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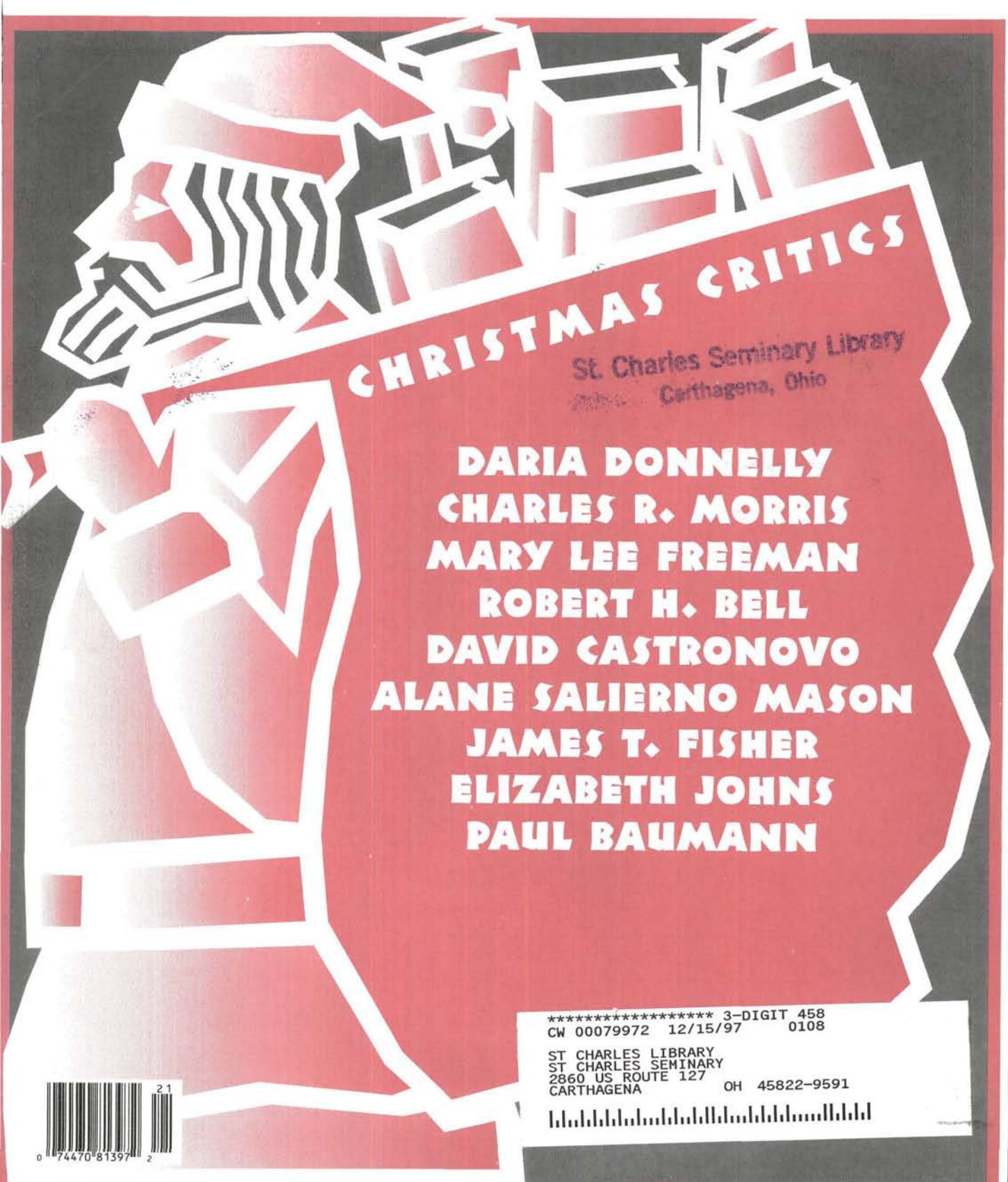

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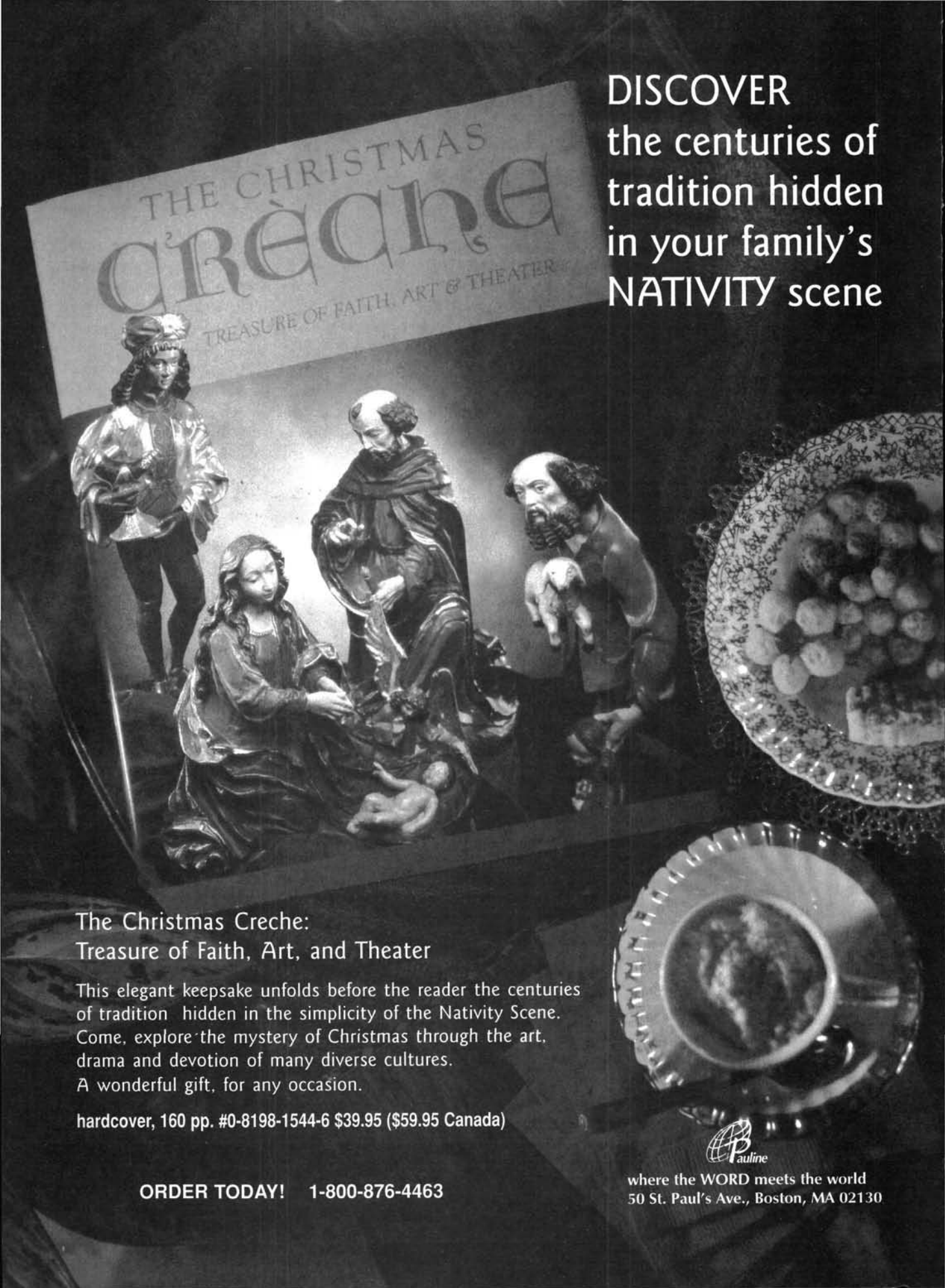

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COMMONWEAL

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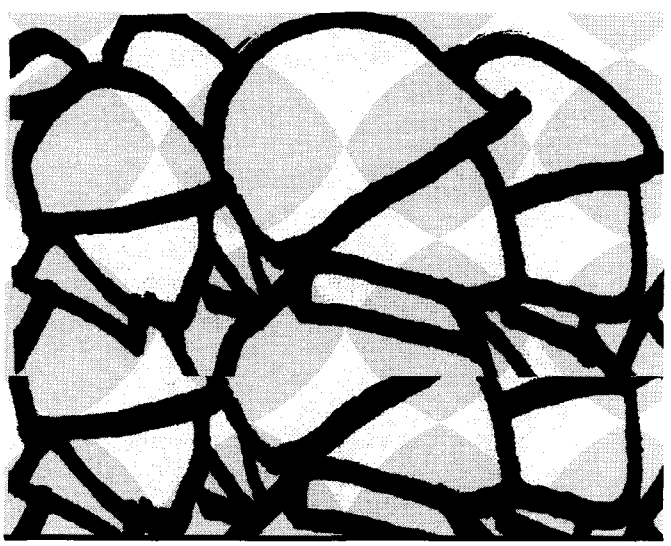

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To the Editors

Shaman? Thaumaturge?

Perhaps you should advertise for an alchemist instead of a business manager. Best of luck. GERALDINE ETHEN
Portland, Oreg.

McConnell on Wendy

Frank McConnell's "A Nun's Story," his review of Sister Wendy on PBS [October 24], was just masterly. I have been trying to find the words to describe her shows. Now, I just say, "Read this!" A truly eloquent summation by the most insightful, lively, and well-spoken critic I've encountered. BEN HOGAN, O.CARM.
Niagara Falls, Ont.

Alka-Seltzer, anyone?

My October 24 issue did not arrive until October 28—but it was very much worth the wait. You outdid yourselves. From the editorial, "Nothing Scandalous," deliciously and humorously written, to Bernard Bergonzi's tasteful critique "One Month A.D.D. (After Diana's Death)" to the main course, Patrick Jordan's "An Appetite for God: Dorothy Day at 100," you presented a glorious feast, which I thoroughly enjoyed.

I can't believe I ate the whole thing!

At once! ANNE M. MONGOVEN, O.P.
San Jose, Calif.

Dorothy with a smile!

Thank you, thank you, thank you for giving us a picture of Dorothy Day SMILING! [October 24, p. 12]. I have lived in the Saint Francis Catholic Worker House here for eleven years, and cannot recall seeing one picture of her smiling, not one. You didn't computer-generate the image, did you? (Just kidding.) JACK DRUMKE
Chicago, Ill.

Day & Fr. Hugo's retreat

Thanks to Patrick Jordan for his discerning portrait of Dorothy Day [October 24]. Let me add a comment on Dorothy's own discernment. In the Bowery's grim squalor, she discerned nobility in every beat-up waif. Though the urban church often concentrated on novenas and bingo, she discovered an authentic Christianity in Father Hugo's retreat calling her to liturgical worship, Scripture reading, and contemplation. In the light of those conferences, she moved from hyper-activity to heroic holiness.

Most retreatants who heard the Hugo message *viva voce* embraced it, and characterized the retreat as liberating them from a cozy religiosity. Others who picked up only second-hand and distorted myths tended to frown. A reliable evaluation of the retreat and its effects could be obtained from Sister Peter Claver Fahy, alive and ministering in Philadelphia, and from thousands of letters and documents in the Catholic Worker archives at Marquette University.

I knew Dorothy and "served" at the Catholic Worker House in Manhattan before, during, and after her joyful espousal of the Hugo retreat from 1939 to her death in 1980. This occasion of grace became her second conversion, as valid as the first. She wrote, "It was like hearing the gospel for the first time." She discerned the authenticity of the Hugo retreat and resisted faulty imaginings about it.

Yes, "she took what she wanted from the retreat." She took a hope to purify and refine her interior life and thus become more effective in her ministry to the poorest of the poor. Her hope was fulfilled.

(REV.) HARVEY EGAN
Minneapolis, Minn.

No cheap grace

Thank you for Patrick Jordan's good article on Dorothy Day, but it puzzles us how he could write so well on Dorothy and so poorly on Father John Hugo. The article, which seemed to be mainly anecdotal, trivialized Father Hugo, who served as Dorothy's spiritual director, assisted her in organizing the famous retreat, and was the theologian responsible for most of the articles on pacifism published in the *Catholic Worker*. It was Dorothy's dream to set up a permanent retreat center for priests to make the Lacouture retreat, the retreat given by Father Hugo.

To suggest that Hugo wasn't holistic and didn't really influence Dorothy is revisionism of the worst kind. She never had any doubt about his integrity and orthodoxy and would have followed him to the stake had he gone the route of Savanarola. Next to Peter Maurin, Hugo was the most important influence in her life. *See* the 1996 book edited by Anne Klejment and Nancy L. Roberts, *American Catholic Pacifism* (Greenwood Press), on his role in the development of the theology of pacifism at the Catholic Worker, and William Miller's *A Harsh and Dreadful Love* (Image Books).

Father Hugo asked no more of Catholics than a Saint Francis, Léon Bloy, Peter Maurin, Pope John Paul II, or the Gospels, and for this was unpopular because the bourgeois spirit is a cancer that runs deep in American culture. For Hugo there was no cheap grace. He knew the truth of Bonhoeffer and of Vatican II: "Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of the church."

We made the retreat twice and knew Father Hugo and the so-called "Hugo priests" well. They were profoundly spiritual, full of wisdom, holy and holistic, totally unwooden and unrigid; we have not seen the likes of them since.

The rector of the seminary one of us attended was named bishop of Pittsburgh in 1950 with instructions to discipline Father Hugo. When Bishop (later Cardinal) Dearden left the diocese in 1959, he held Father Hugo in the highest esteem. Bishop (later Cardinal) Wright, who succeeded Dear-

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The least-bad solution

A military confrontation between the United States and Iraq has been narrowly averted—at least for now. Iraq has agreed to readmit American inspectors along with the rest of the United Nations weapons inspection teams, and forestalled a certain American military response. Whether Saddam Hussein, Iraq's tyrannical leader, has learned anything from this near calamity is dubious. What the international community has learned once again about Iraq is frightening.

At this juncture no fair-minded person can dispute the threat to peace and the enormous moral challenge Iraq presents to the community of nations. Most worrisome in the immediate future is that during last month's tense standoff after Iraq's expulsion of American UN inspectors, Hussein had time to hide or destroy evidence of weapons of mass destruction as well as to assemble new stocks of chemical and biological agents. The painstaking work of the UN in tracking shipments of raw materials and scouring industrial sites is not easy, and in recent years Iraq has become much bolder in foiling efforts at detection. Four weeks without UN supervision have given the Iraqis time to move materiel and equipment, considerably strengthening their hand. And even now, as the situation returns to "normal," there is little to suggest that Iraq will prove more compliant with UN demands. Hundreds of suspicious sites have been declared off-limits by the Iraqis. Until the UN gains unfettered access to such places, it cannot responsibly certify that all of Hussein's biological and chemical weapons have been destroyed. Nor is there much hope that the U.S. will be able to forge the kind of international consensus needed to stiffen the UN's enforcement powers. In short, Iraq's potential threat to world peace is possibly greater now than it was before the crisis began.

Saddam Hussein's determination to reconstitute his military machine is not a problem that is going to go away any time soon. The most recent crisis appears to have been precipitated when France and Russia abstained from a U.S.-sponsored resolution demanding greater compliance on weapons inspections from Iraq. Hussein evidently took the vote as a sign of UN weakness. France and Russia, whose commercial interests in Iraq are significant, have been pressing for an end to the UN economic sanctions imposed on Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War. Hussein hoped to divide the U.S. from other Security Council members by expelling American weapons inspectors and threatening to shoot down U.S. reconaissance planes. But when the United States responded by sending two aircraft carriers, 300 combat planes, and twenty warships to the Gulf, France and Russia put their economic interests aside and urged Hussein to back down. In return, Russia has evidently agreed to voice Iraq's interests in the Security Council.

In this instance, it appears that the threat of violence has forestalled the use of violence. Unfortunately, the danger of Iraq's biological and chemical capability remains. Containing that danger will continue to require firm leadership from the U.S. and even greater resolution on the part of the UN. Yes, Russian and French resentment toward U.S. power and Arab suspicions about U.S. support for Israel are part of the diplomatic equation. Nevertheless, it is important

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The Frank W. Considine Chair in Applied Ethics has been established at Loyola University Chicago to bring experts to Loyola to make connections among institutional interests as well as between the university and its urban context. It is anticipated that the chair holder will speak with authority to issues dealing with current topics in business, the professions, and public policy. By developing themes that have been part of the Judeo-Christian tradition, the chair holder is expected to provide stimulus and advancement to this tradition and thereby contribute to the Jesuit mission of the university.

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to emphasize that the source of this conflict is not the narrow pursuit of U.S. interests in the Middle East, but Iraq's refusal to destroy and fully account for its weapons. Many people of good will have urged the UN to lift the economic sanctions against Iraq because they have caused great suffering among the Iraqi people, especially children. The U.S. has rightly insisted, however, that sanctions not be lifted until Hussein's regime fully complies with the UN's resolution on weapons. Hussein cannot be allowed to use the suffering he imposes on his own people to blackmail the international community into allowing him to resume stockpiling weapons that can kill millions, weapons that he has not hesitated to use in the past against the Iranians and the Kurds. Furthermore, it should be noted that the U.S. has supported purely humanitarian aid to the Iraqi people, but that until recently Hussein has refused it.

There are no good answers to the problem posed by Saddam Hussein's control of fearsome weaponry. Like enforcing the nuclear nonproliferation agreements, policing the world for biological and chemical weapons will require a degree of international cooperation and resolve that seems almost utopian. But some answers are better than others. For now, the return of UN inspectors holds out the possibility, if not the likelihood, that more drastic action can be avoided. That possibility should be pursued with every energy. At the same time, President Bill Clinton must prepare the American people for the next showdown in the Middle East by better explaining what is at stake when a rogue nation possesses weapons of mass destruction. Our old Gulf War allies appear to need some firm reminders as well.

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SIDNEY CALLAHAN

NUNSUCH?

Reviving religious communities

Recently I was invited to speak to a conference of vowed religious on the identity of the religious vocation from a layperson's perspective, and to comment on the future of religious life.

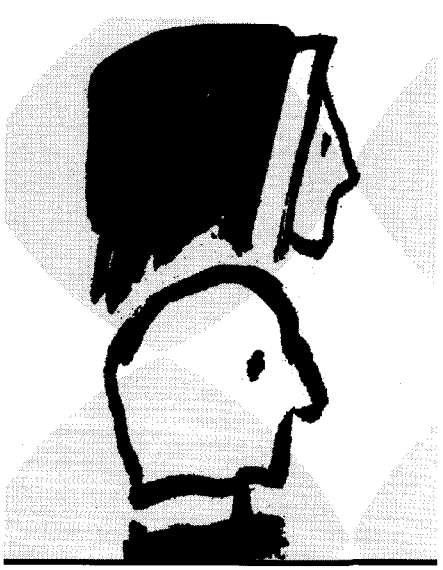
To fulfill my assignment and to "get up to speed," I began reading articles on why new vocations to religious orders are declining and why so many religious left after Vatican II. Along the way I received an eye-opening view of the history of women's orders by reading Jo Ann Kay McNamara's book, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Harvard University Press, 1996).

Throughout the last two thousand years, the forms of religious life in the church have constantly evolved and changed. As historical conditions altered and Christianity spread to different cultures, religious life adapted. New orders were founded and new ministries undertaken. It doesn't take too much acumen to conclude that present developments may be one more transition.

Today the major challenge for those in vowed religious vocations involves the assimilation of the teaching and reforms of Vatican II. If, for instance, religious life is no longer exalted above other states of life in the church, and in particular, if it is no longer judged as superior to marriage, then why make the sacrifices involved? If, in addition, lay people can fulfill all the ministries within the church and in the world that religious used to perform, why join a vowed religious community?

Some writers, analyzing religious life today, see what is happening as a process of necessary purification; the vowed religious vocation is being purged of all the reverence and temptations to false pride and comfort that a religious vocation once enjoyed. Now there's no more mystique, or lifelong security with an assured slot in some fully staffed religious institution. Professionalization of many jobs in hospitals, colleges, and social work has meant that all religious cannot automatically count on fulfilling ministries, or on having access to the economic resources needed to support their communities. Parishes love to have a "generic sister" toiling in their vineyard, but appear less wiling to pay her a living wage.

For theologian Sandra Schneiders, the religious vocation is being stripped to its core meaning. Religious must recognize the "naked God-quest in the center of their hearts," which makes an "exclusive and total demand upon them in consecrated celibacy, voluntary poverty, community, and corporate mission." Agreed. As a married layperson I can endorse this definition of the religious life. Moreover, I can attest that religious vocations strengthen the whole body of the church. I view vowed religious vocations as a condensed, crystallized, intensely focused, institutionalized embodiment of every Christian's call to love God and one's neighbor wholeheartedly.



The totality of the commitment and the personal sacrifices entailed give testimony to the fact that God's kingdom exists beyond time and space, beyond what we can see and touch or recognize as common-sense behavior. Vowed religious directly imitate Christ's life of ministry, undertaken for the sake of the whole community and the whole church as a corporate body.

And we certainly need good corporate institutions for human flourishing. We need organized communities to use their collective synergy to fight against the structural oppressions and powers of "social sin." Such systems usually operate beyond the control of individuals caught within the structures—even good, well-meaning individuals. Religious orders can use their corporate strength, arising from the communal commitments of their members, for the loving transformation of the world.

Vowed celibacy is crucial to the religious vocation. Erotic energy dedicated to loving God within the community and focusing on the corporate mission can be incredibly fruitful. Celibacy does not repudiate sexuality but can operate to affirm the values of friendship and the worth of embodied lives beyond sexual reproduction. In the kingdom, sexual roles becomes less important since in Christ there is neither male nor female. The affirmation of personal identity, friendship, and work beyond gendered conventions is particularly important for women's self-esteem and personhood. If sexual reproduction and mating no longer validate bodily life, then human beings who do not mate and reproduce—babies, the young, the old, the ill, the handicapped—are affirmed as valuable members of the human family. I see vowed celibacy as an incest taboo undertaken in order to count everyone as one's family and kin. This no to sexual pair-bonding can free persons to love more inclusively. The permanent vows that religious make also strengthen the permanent vows of married persons.

Marriage and family life are schools of love, but to be true to family claims you usually are limited as to what resources can be given to the larger community. There is only so much time,

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Margaret C. Szumowski

Priest Lost to Church Scaffolding

Only yesterday, in his fine green gown,
he talked of lost sheep
and calves stuck in the mud.
Today he walks the shaky scaffolding
high above the pews,
eye to eye with the risen Christ who hangs above the altar.

He touches ancient cracks in the ceiling.
Are these the thin spots where heaven and earth come together,
where God really is
right at the end of a good man's fingertips?
He thinks so.

Desire has brought him here,
swinging away on the scaffolding
close to God, seeing as God does,
near toppling in his ecstasy.

Stuck in mud, we wonder who this priest is,
once so familiar
that we ate pigs' knuckles and drank stout together.
Now he has gone to heights
that terrify us in our limited desire.

We crouch in pews,
scoffers,
impatient jinglers of keys,
greedy paws,
lovers whacking each other with fry pans,
coughers wheezing,
He's had it, it's the scaffolding for him.

All we want down here is relief!
Remember that, oh you, once our friend,
now wobbling there among the stars.

money, and energy available in one life. There are also limits to the suffering and sacrifices that a person can ask of a spouse or the dependent members of the family. Religious can be freer to suffer more and spend themselves more for the coming of the kingdom in the larger community. The corporate support of their religious brothers and sisters can sustain them in enterprises beyond the capabilities of individuals or most families. It is no accident that the majority of modern Christian martyrs have been vowed religious serving as missionaries in dangerous territory.

Voluntary poverty also serves as a witness against the ingrained greed and love of money in our materialistic culture. Corporate religious groups can be freer to operate by the rule of just care: From each according to his or her gifts and to each according to need. Religious orders can struggle for justice more freely when all of their members are committed to the same ideals of love and charity—and can pay the price. Often Christians must voluntarily take on morally necessary suffering to heal, do the works of mercy, or to end oppression.

Religious who obey authority for the sake of community witness to the existence of the authority of God's truth, as well as to the importance of persevering in an intentional community. Our culture worships individual liberty, autonomy, and controlled hyperprivacy. A permanent commitment to communal life beyond kinship is a startling countercultural witness. Such social norms also give civic society backbone, providing corporate groups that can mediate or stand between individuals and the state. So in the course of renewal today, we find religious orders reemphasizing their corporate identities, refocusing on their distinct ministries, reinstating collective commitment rituals, and recognizing their need for common worship and a common life. The love and support of one's brothers and sisters make the religious vocation possible—and give it power.

Yes, as we go into the next millennium, I am sure that the church will be blessed with the survival and revival of religious vocations, thanks be to God. □

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John Francis Burke

A TWIST IN HOUSTON

Affirmative action affirmed, denied

Bucking what some consider a nationwide trend, voters in Houston, Texas, turned down an anti-affirmative action ballot initiative on November 7 by a margin of 55 percent to 45 percent. At the same time they gave a 42-percent plurality of votes in the multi-candidate mayoral election to a black candidate, Lee Brown, former chief of police in both New York City and Houston.

But both these victories are shadowed. Defeat of the referendum, though it brought euphoria to progressives here and nationally, may be rendered moot by a court case challenging the legality of the very set-aside program just rescued by the voters. And, under Texas law, Brown's failure to gain an absolute majority in the mayoral election means that he faces a run-off election on December 6 against second-place winner Robert Mosbacher, who received 29 percent of the November 7 votes.

Without a doubt, defeat of the anti-affirmative action referendum was in large part the result of a heavy turnout of blacks responding both to the initiative and to Brown's candidacy. Black voters rejected the initiative ("Proposition A") by a 9-1 margin. At least 30 percent of eligible voters in black precincts across the city, and 47 percent in middle-class black precincts, went to the polls. Mexican-Americans also voted in larger numbers than usual and turned down the proposition by a 3-1 margin.

These results were hardly surprising. More curious was the dead-even split among low-income white voters; 51 percent voted "yes," thereby rejecting affirmative action, and 49 percent "no." Some have speculated that confusion among voters may account for this result, since voting "yes" to Proposition A meant voting "no" to affirmative action, and vice versa. But a gender gap among low- and mid-income whites is a more likely explanation; Houston's affirmative-action system favors women as well as "minorities."

Beyond the numbers, another reason Proposition A was defeated was the organized opposition mounted by both the Houston business community and the outgoing mayor, Bob Lanier. Economically, Houston has profited enormously from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the business community has concluded that cultivating Houston's multicultural character brings benefits that would be endangered by backward-looking undertakings like Proposition A. The city's planning and development department projects that by the year 2000, the city's population will be 39 percent Latino/a, 29 percent black, and 7 percent Asian—what Father Virgil Elizondo refers to as a "global city." Although racial and cultural relations are by no means perfect, Houston has had a constructive history of racial and ethnic interaction.

Mayor Lanier's vigorous campaign against Proposition A and its supporters was so intense that their debate overshadowed the mayoral race. In the closing week of the campaign, Lanier ran an ingenious (and gutsy) television commercial arguing that passage of the proposition would mean a return to the bad old days when "only white males like me got jobs and city contracts." Lanier's strong opposition to the proposition was no surprise. Four years ago, he enlisted community leaders in a collective effort to rid the city of racial, religious, and other forms of prejudice.

Under Houston's affirmative-action program, actually only 20 percent of the city's contracts are set aside for minority or women contractors. But it developed, a week after the vote, that this moderation may not be enough to save it. On November 13, U.S. District Court Judge Lynn N. Hughes struck down the strikingly similar affirmative-action program of the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Houston as a form of reverse discrimination. Another lawsuit challenging Houston's program is now on Judge Hughes's docket.

A victory for Lee Brown in the December 6 run-off election is hardly a sure thing. His opponent, Robert Mosbacher, is an energy industry executive with extensive resources for campaign advertising. He also has name recognition because of previous runs for statewide offices and his father's service as secretary of commerce in the Bush administration. Since the affirmative-action proposition will not be on the ballot, Brown will have to work hard to sustain his base among black voters and to reach out to those who voted for the other candidates in the November 7 balloting.

It's my view, or hope, that if Brown draws upon the multicultural, global vision of the coalition that defeated Proposition A, Mosbacher and his money cannot beat him. But if elected, will Brown choose, to borrow from Cornel West, to be a "race-transcending prophetic leader" such as Chicago's Harold Washington, who tempered political demands with a moral vision, or simply a "race-effacing managerial leader" like Los Angeles's Thomas Bradley or Philadelphia's Wilson Goode, whose vision of politics was purely mainstream?

Regardless of the uncertain outcome of the mayoral election and the legal challenge to Houston's affirmative-action program, the multiracial, cosmopolitan coalition that handily defeated the anti-affirmative action proposition offers a progressive "unity-in-diversity" model for all of America's "global cities" to emulate. □

John Francis Burke *teaches in the political science department of the University of Saint Thomas in Houston.*

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A SOLDIER'S LEGACY

Faith born on the killing fields

Robert Ostermann

Taking the long view, a religious conversion must be understood as an invisible event. The action happens off-stage, behind the scenes; spectators observe only the conclusion. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter and exit *Hamlet* without a personal history: influential figures in the tapestry but ciphers just the same.

Many articulate converts have tried to describe their conversion experiences. About all they can agree on is that it turns one inside out and nothing in one's life ever is the same again. It's like your first time entering school. You are silenced by fright, and you wonder how you got there, what is happening, and where it all ends. Without being blinded and stunned out of your wits, you are the subject of a less noisy and dramatic contemporary equivalent of Saul of Tarsus flung headlong into the dust on the Damascus road and later coming back to life as Paul: a new man.

But however elusive it may be in its origins, a conversion leaves signs along the trail. Like a love affair, once it is under way you can look back and identify some of the moments that nudged, and teased, and maneuvered you toward your lover.

That is how it was with a conversion that broke surface for me in 1948 and has never since left me alone or at peace with what I am and what I do. The following narrative describes one of a number of such trail markers along my conversion itinerary. But seeing the sign does not strip the event of its mystery.

Jim Palermino grew up in a tough, battered neighborhood on Chicago's South Side. I met him when I had crossed the English Channel in 1944 to join the 42nd Cavalry, one of two-gun George Patton's favored outfits for scouting the location and strength of enemy forces. It was a few weeks after the Normandy landing.

Jim was gunner in my armored car. He displayed a startling array of contrasts, and no matter how close combat experience brought us, he always remained an enigma to me. It was my practice in those years to turn people into types (an easy way to keep them in their place), but Jim defied the system. He rarely did the expected. He fit no pattern. He moved through our war's carnage, madness, and degradation with the kind of irrefutable serenity one sees on the features of a Fra Angelico angel.

Then there were the contrasts. Jim was complete master of his weapons, .30- and .50-caliber machine guns and a 57mm cannon. He knew their capabilities. He fired accurately, never wasting ammunition. He had a superb eye for estimating distance to an enemy position. He rarely missed moving targets.

Jim handled his weapons with uncommon delicacy, and it still seems wondrously inexplicable to me, fifty years later. Stripping them for cleaning, he meticulously washed and oiled each piece as if it were Waterford crystal. I pondered that fact and would tell myself that they were killers and here he was treating them like babies. This was something I simply did not understand, because at the same time Jim had an awesome proficiency with those guns. A lot of Germans died of his proficiency.

That didn't fit, either. I knew soldiers—few of us at the time did not know some—who were thrilled by killing. Not Jim. It was his function to kill, he killed, that was the end of it. He never spoke about it afterwards, the way some gunmen have to keep tasting the excitement repeatedly until the next kill.

Killing was Jim's job, and he did it. The job was not his life, it was not his master. I am certain he would have been the same man delivering milk or clerking in a store. He would perform his duties, and at the end of the day leave them behind him. He had detachment, independence, and, beyond independence, freedom. Jim was his own man.

A slice of popular sentimental cant during World War II declared with indefensible confidence that there were no atheists in foxholes; the slogan even became the title of a hugely successful, comforting book. (It pacified public anxiety over the morality of soldiers, I suppose.) The assumption was that fear and shock and the presence of brutal death must elevate a soldier's mind and heart to eternal verities.

The expectation is appealing, but that's not the way it was. Not in my battle experience, nor in those widely reported during the wars in Korea and Vietnam. To hold a brief for unbreachable U.S. moral superiority is another facet of American chauvinistic cant. Reminds me of my mother in the 1950s blaming immigrants for the country's rising criminality, blithely ignoring that in so doing she converted her and my father's mother and father, my grandparents, into criminals.

Soldiers drunk on the moral pollution of modern warfare do not reverse their values. They continue to prize the interests that filled their lives. If it took a man long enough to die, he might get round, finally, to God. For most of us, however, death meant nothing more than the loss of life, an extremely precious, fragile commodity. In the ordinary course of things, God had little to do with it. God, assuming we were believ-

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ers, was secondary. Our goal was to stay alive, in one piece.

Speaking for myself, if I thought about it at all, I regretted my past only because I knew that it could easily become an inescapable dead end; the time-line was continuous. I gave little thought to what I may or may not have done in my past or what I had made of it. My concern was with the existence that I now had a high probability of losing.

For Jim, however, God immovably occupied the top of his list. Scouting miles behind enemy lines or resting safely within our own, it did not matter. Jim always appeared devout, accepting, gentle, helpful. He was for me the first person, and to this day still is among the very few I know, who would say with perfect conviction and solemn patience—"God willing" or "God is good"—when the machinery of decision (somewhere) confronted him with a doubtful issue. And most issues then were extremely doubtful indeed.

I never heard Jim curse, or use profanity, or blaspheme, and I am dead certain he never tried to reform anyone (anyway, not me!) who did. He reacted to our vile speech as he did to his job, which later I appreciated must have been specially vile to him. Our gutter words were part of reality, and in Jim's philosophy, one lived with reality as given but did not necessarily join in. If our language agonized him, he kept it hidden behind features almost always set in grave, melancholy lines.

I knew Jim was Catholic because he carried and used a rosary and wore a religious medal round his neck, and several times I saw him receive Communion at a field Mass. Other than these signs, he did not speak of his faith. And I was too insensitive to connect the presence of faith with the behavior of the man.

Who says war is not criminal, one of the supreme atrocities of our criminal century, speaks an inexcusable lie. And let no one (politicians, for sure, theologians, too) dare defend, or rationalize, war or any other form of "permissible" killing until he or she has fixed another human being in their sights and squeezed the trigger, or has felt they are fixed in another gunner's cross-hairs. Long-distance death-making is not enough.

It is easy to rejoice in righteous slaughter when you are a comfortable 5,000 miles away from it and it is not your doing. It is easy to issue patriotic platitudes and salute a tattered flag when you have not seen a fountain of blood erupting from the chest you have perforated or watched a face squashed flat and smeared like scarlet paste. It is painless to be a warmonger.

Looking back across the fifty-plus years, I submit that Jim Palermino subdued war's criminality. He proved to me that you could be in it but not of it, could go through it without taking it with you. He would not, and never did, become war's accomplice. Jim provided me, when I knew enough to appreciate it, a ready-made answer to the Manichaeans and other advocates of a witless universe. Acceptance, yes; complicity, no. Join these two and the syllogism concludes in implacable defiance.

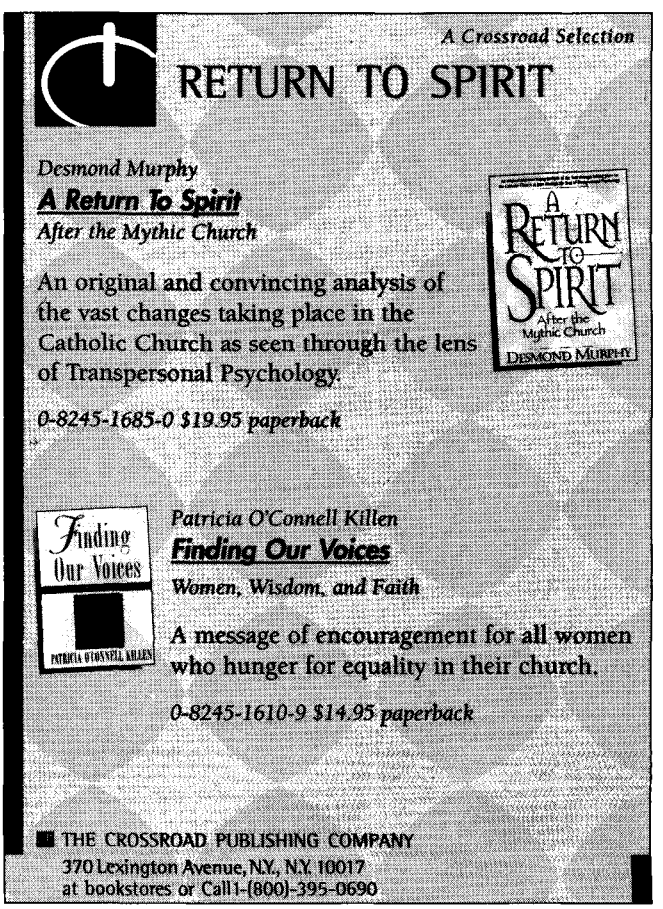
I also learned during those days of war that you could not count on being frightened into believing in God—not a belief, anyway, that was more than a shot in the arm, a toxin immunizing one against fear. During our sweep across Europe, it wasn't the facts of war and their uncertain outcome that inspired the attributes of faith in Jim Palermino, not to mention prayerful dignity, grace, courage, and gentleness under fire. It was his love of God in the person of Jesus Christ that sustained him—bore him up, as earlier scriptural language has it. It was his trust that the prayers he offered through the Mother of God were not indifferently received.

Ten years passed before I could read Jim's lessons. They are as present to me today as my damaged spine and arthritic joints.

Jim and I never again met, although I later heard that he had survived the war, thank God. He can not know it, but he remains imperishably in my small pantheon of people precious for having permanently altered my life. My memories of him are unquenchable.

This soldier-comrade was both portent and witness of my future, and I am saddened that he shall never see how great is my debt to him. Without his knowing, or mine for that matter, he helped reset my moral compass. At a certain moment in my life, which I, of course, cannot fix with a date and hour, I started to change direction. The hand on the switch for the track that I chose, however, was Jim Palermino's.

I can not return Jim to history without mentioning one more gift he made me, merely by being who he was, where he was. He illustrated and modeled in his behavior an ancient truth, a truth that rarely is honored because it so rarely is comfortable to make it one's own. It is the truth that says: There are human beings. There is choice. And that choice—how you make it, how you implement it, how you accept its consequences—has the final word. □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Richard Alleva

FRIGID SEX

'Boogie Nights' and 'The Ice Storm'

The best thing about *Boogie Nights*, a lengthy and panoramic view of the porn film industry in the late 1970s and early '80s, is that it is not nonjudgmental, not laid back, not bemused by its subject matter. Though you can feel Paul Thomas Anderson's affection and pity for his characters (a 155-minute film entirely populated by the rebarbative would put viewers to flight before it was half over), it's clear that he regards them as engaged in a loathsome enterprise, pernicious to themselves and destructive of society at large. This is, in fact, such a moral film that it sometimes threatens to become moralistic. But Anderson's talent keeps his movie fierce, incisive, and purposeful.

Self-deception (and its consequences) is the theme and is perpetrated by nearly every one of the *dramatis personae*. The ace porn director Jack Horner (Burt Reynolds superbly deploying both his charming flippancy and the self-contempt that I suspect has always lurked within that flippancy) considers himself a true star maker when he takes a pathetic high school drop-out named Eddie Adams and makes him the lead stud of his latest opus. Rechristened Dirk Diggler, the boy thinks himself a real actor, a Napoleonic talent on the march. But what kind of stardom is it that depends upon penis length and the ability to ejaculate on cue? Let "Dirk Diggler" get just a bit older and less athletically sexual and his director will start looking around for younger studs, reducing "Dirk" to poor little Eddie Adams again, only now, alas, with a cocaine habit he can ill afford.

And where did that drug habit come from? Surprisingly and pathetically, from Amber Wave, the sex goddess of Jack Horner's films and the director's offscreen lover. Bereft of her children when her ex-husband cites her career during custody hearings as proof of her unfitness as a mother, Amber fastens on Eddie as a surrogate son. But how to demonstrate her affection? Well, cocaine makes her feel good (harrowingly, the actress Julienne Moore shows the light of intelligence dimming in Amber's eyes as she gets deeper into her habit), so why not share it with her beloved little boy? This instance of self-deception isn't treated satirically by Paul Thomas Anderson but with poignancy. Yet the poignancy never conceals the horrific consequences of such motherly care.

I don't have space enough to list the multiple acts of self-deceit that make up the substance of *Boogie Nights* but suffice it to say that some are sad, most are hilarious, a few lead to monstrous violence, and all are subsumed by the biggest self-deception of all: Jack Horner's illusion that he is an Artist who makes Beauty by pointing his camera at copulating couples. The cold water of reality is poured down on Horner's head by society itself. Sure, his pornography has found its paying public. It's the late seventies and the Playboy Philosophy has prevailed with a significant number of Americans: if it feels good, it *is* good. But what Horner can't guess is that his audience is much more clear-eyed in its satyriasis than he was in catering to it. Yes, it wants hardcore, but it wants it fast and cheap, and in the privacy of the home. And indeed, by the mideighties videos are in and big-screen pornography is in retreat. For quickie porn videos, pretty photography is *de trop*, coherent storytelling can be dispensed with, dialogue is beside the point, and so is any pretense of acting. Only one thing matters: meat on parade. By the time Jack Horner is riding around in a limousine, trying to pick up young men to do the starlet in the back seat, with everything to be captured on videotape, the director knows very well what he has become: a pimp with a camera. He and most of his colleagues don't end up utterly destroyed (*Boogie*'s epilogue implies that porn is forever), but their dreams of artistry are gone. This movie might have borne the title that Balzac attached to one of his novels: *Lost Illusions*.

Boogie Nights is never boring, yet, in one sense, its length is a drawback. Since we always know more about the characters then they know of themselves, we are always looking down on them. In pity, in amusement, or in contempt, but always down. Despite excellent acting by the entire cast, not one of the char-

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acters becomes an outsized Rabelaisian monster; they all remain pathetically deluded. By the time the film moved into its third hour, my feelings of superiority to the people on screen were backing up on me and turning into smugness. And believe it or not, even a critic doesn't really enjoy feeling smug.

In a sense, our real companion during our tour through *Boogie Nights* isn't one of its characters, but their creator. We feel this writer-director's presence the way we feel the presence of a novel's author in the shape and flow of sentences and paragraphs. Anderson understands what Martin Scorsese and Orson Wells have demonstrated in their best works: For the meaningful compression and expansion, watch the scene in which Eddie and two other guys wait in a room with a rich gangster while the hoodlum's huge bodyguard, off-camera, tests the purity of the cocaine the youths have brought to sell. Nothing much happens for a while. The boys merely sit on a couch while the homosexual gangster grooves to loud rock music and his boy-toy sets off firecrackers. Yet the explosions and the music and the nervous reactions of the boys fill this one static shot so full of tension that we long for something, anything, to happen. The screen time of this shot is perhaps one minute. But it seems like an hour of exquisite, savory torture.

For meaningful compression there is another scene involving drugs. The still unaddicted Eddie and his sidekick Reed are waiting for a dealer to show up with some cocaine. He arrives. The boys beam: "Perfect timing!" Cut to the very next shot, but now a few weeks or months have gone by. The same dealer arrives with more dope. The now hooked youths look at him and snarl, "What took you so long?" Between these two shots, enslavement has happened.

By the time you read this, Anderson will probably have been signed to a new project, for *Boogie Nights* has made him a contender. Let's hope that while he was sitting around swimming pools in Beverly Hills negotiating with writers, agents, and executives, he kept a clear head. Hollywood could stand having one cold-eyed moralist on the scene.

The Taiwanese director Ang Lee has obviously done a lot of research in order to depict the Connecticut suburbia of 1973 for his film, *The Ice Storm*, a portrait of the sexually restless middle class during a Thanksgiving weekend. And, yes, the research is all up there on the screen: the army of commuters packing a train station, the faces of Nixon and all those inquiring senators on TV during the Watergate hearings, the bongs for marijuana, the water bed, the shoulder-length hair on a clergyman trying to be groovy. However, though Lee has captured the period, the period has captured him. This movie functions better as a museum exhibit of the '70s than as a drama. In *Boogie Nights*, the characters are certainly illustrative of their period and milieu but are also idiosyncratic individuals. The adult characters of *The Ice Storm* are mostly just emblems of their era who might as well be holding placards against their chests reading: Beautiful but Frigid Housewife; Organization Man Chafing at the Marital Bit; Suburban Vamp Trying to Turn New Canaan into Greenwich Village.

However, the adolescent characters are allowed to show some individuality and the youthful actors all come through with performances that are both finely shaded and spontaneous. The concluding tragic scenes featuring that eponymous freeze are eerily staged, with Jamey Sheridan powerfully projecting a bereaved father's grief. Ang Lee is a director of Mozartian wit and buoyancy and he keeps this shallow movie, at the very least, briskly watchable. But my eyes kept wandering away from the faces of Kevin Kline and Joan Allen and over to some TV set in the background to watch the Watergate hearings. Extraordinary fact easily upstages banal fiction.

Having just seen *Boogie Nights*, I found one scene of *The Ice Storm* sociologically acute. When members of a dinner party discuss *Deep Throat* (the movie, not the informer) as if it were an interesting art film rather than a piece of filth, we may realize why pornographers like Jack Horner suddenly began to think of themselves as artists. □

Justus George Lawler

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Critics' choices for Christmas

Daria Donnelly

Daria Donnelly, a free-lance writer, lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

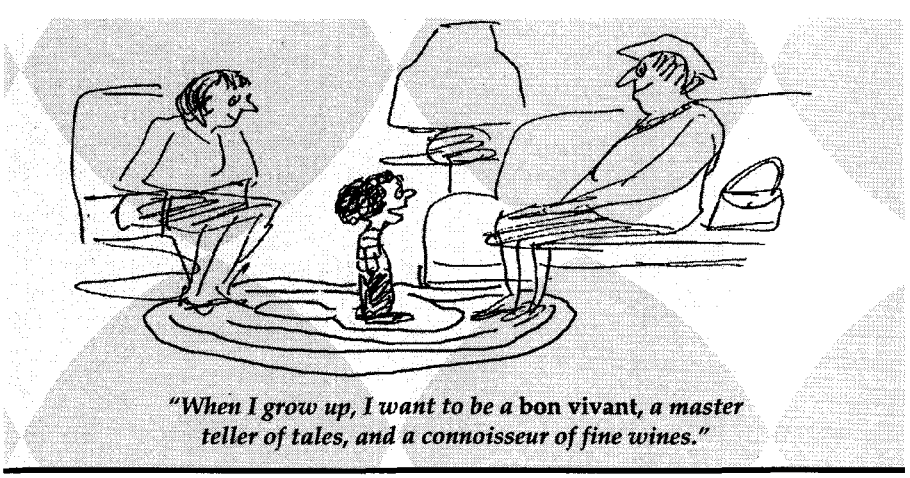
When I was young our house was full of poetry. My mother spoke to us in a language made magical and strange by poetic allusion. Our goings were (and are still) accompanied by her dramatic recitation of Juliet's "Farewell! God knows when we shall meet again." Like other children, each night we gathered on one bed and our mother read to us. Our favorite poems came from Louis Untermeyer's *The Golden Treasury of Poetry*, Mary O'Neill's *Hailstones and Halibut Bones* and, most memorably, Heinrich Hoffman's *Struwwelpeter*, where punishments meted out by Fate (not parents!) to disobedient children were thrillingly hyperbolic.

Now a mother myself, I am delighting in the delight of a child hearing poems. Children are natural poets — words for them being more matter than medium — and their canny and joyful response to poetry can refresh the most weary user of language. In our home, Mother Goose is queen and Edward Lear a prince. We like three Mother Goose picture books very much: *My Very First Mother Goose*, edited by Iona Opie and illustrated by Rosemary Wells (Candlewick, $21.99, 107 pp.); *Over the Moon*, illustrated by Charlotte Voake (Candlewick, $12.99, 121 pp.); and *The Arnold Lobel Book of Mother Goose* (Knopf, $21, 176 pp.). Each illustrator brings forward particular aspects of the world described by these weird anonymous rhymes: Lobel's Humpty Dumpty is a slow-motion fall into tragic consciousness; Voake emphasizes his serene acceptance of the inevitable smash-up and the absurdity of horses and men laboring so earnestly against it; Wells figures Humpty as the victim of an impish youngster who tips his dreaded eggcup off the table, his tin soldiers attentive if bewildered witnesses.

Although there are many great illustrated versions of Edward Lear, the Everyman's Library Children's Classics edition of *A Book of Nonsense* (Knopf, $12.95, 287 pp.) offers the complete Lear with his own unsurpassed line drawings. Lear is grand: his melancholy perfectly leavens the bizarre situations, absurd neologisms, and hyperbolic humor of the limericks and longer poems. One of my favorite poems in the world is "The Quangle Wangle's Hat" about a morose Quangle Wangle whose mood lifts when he lets his 102-foot-wide beaver hat become a nest for all comers. Lear fans will also enjoy Quentin Blake's illustrated *Penguin Book of Nonsense Verse* (Penguin, $12.95, 283 pp.) with generous selections from Lear, Nash, Belloc, Carroll, and modern masters of nonsense.

Two contemporary poetry picture books we love are *The Maestro Plays* by Bill Martin, Jr. (Henry Holt, $6, 36 pp.), and Jamey Gambrell's adaptation of Kornei Chukovsky's Russian nonsense poem, *Telephone* (North-South Books, $15.95, 25 pp.). Both are illustrated by Vladimir Radunsky, whose witty and wild collages perfectly complement the verbal extravaganza. In the present picture book renaissance, some older books are coming back into print, and Margaret Wise Brown's 1950 *The Quiet Noisy Book* with pictures by Leonard Weisgard (Harper Trophy, $4.95, 35 pp.) is one not to be missed. It is the most lyrical and delicate of her Noisy Books series, a hymn to a small dog's perception of the sound before the sound: "It was an alarm clock springing to ring. It was a butterfly unfolding his wings. It was the milkman whispering to his horse. It was a new leaf uncurling."

From the late 1950s through the 1960s, the capacious children's poetry treasury reigned: Louis Untermeyer in America, Barbara Ireson in England, plus new editions of Walter de la Mare's glorious mother of all anthologies, *Come Hither*, and its miniature, *Tom Tiddler's Ground*. The direct descendent of these wonderful companions is Neil Philip's *A New Treasury of Poetry* (Stewart, Tabori & Chang, $27.50, 256 pp.) with woodcut illustrations by John Lawrence, great for all ages. A perfect first anthology is X.J. and Dorothy Kennedy's *Talking Like the*



"When I grow up, I want to be a **bon vivant,** *a master teller of tales, and a connoisseur of fine wines."*

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Rain (Little Brown, $19.95, 96 pp.) with pictures by Jane Dyer. Our other favorite anthologies are Barbara Rogasky's *Winter Poems* (Scholastic, $15.95, 40 pp.), sublimely illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman, and Naomi Shihab Nye's *This Same Sky: A Collection of Poems from around the World* (Simon and Schuster, $17, 212 pp.). Both are gorgeous, intelligent collections—one opening up our understanding of a season, the other of our world.

Finally, for adult readers, is David Lehman's superlative *Ecstatic Occasions, Expedient Forms* (University of Michigan $16.95, 266 pp.), an anthology in which eighty-five leading contemporary poets present and comment on one of their poems. Learn how John Ashbery, Anthony Hecht, Richard Wilbur, and the pseudonymous nonpareil Jim Dolot make poems. Serious fun. Merry Christmas!

Charles R. Morris

Charles R. Morris's most recent book is American Catholic *(Times Books/Random House). He lives in New York City.*

Cynthia Ozick's *The Puttermesser Papers* (Knopf, $23, 235 pp.) and Thomas Pynchon's *Mason and Dixon* (Henry Holt, $27.50, 773 pp.) are among the more dazzling fictions in such a fiction-rich year that *Mason and Dixon* did not even make the short list for the National Book Awards.

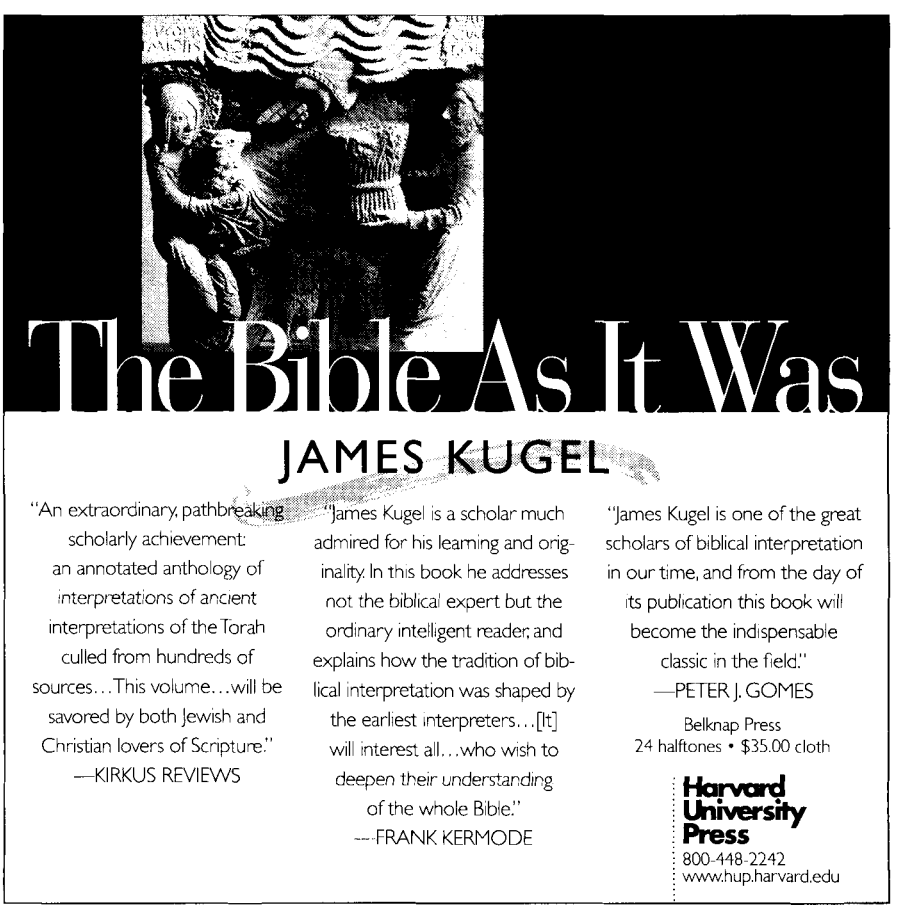
On the surface, the scope and pretensions of the two books could not be more different. *Puttermesser* is a slender volume whose eponymous heroine—her name means "butter-knife"—is a lonely Jewish intellectual lawyer-bureaucrat, who becomes mayor of New York and dies, an old lady, as the victim of a brutal rape/robbery. *Mason and Dixon* is a gargantuan tale that leaps the globe from the East Indies to the wilds of colonial Pennsylvania, along the way sucking up minor characters and plot lines like some giant air-borne amoeba—the mechanical duck, the Chinese court astronomers Hsi and Ho, the Jesuit Zarpazo (the "Wolf of Jesus"), a pot-smoking, kash-ka-eating George Washington.

But both Ozick and Pynchon share an over-the-top authorial sensibility that leaps from the mundane to the mythic without so much as a gasp. Puttermesser becomes mayor with the help of a golem, who makes her the most successful mayor in the history of New York and then inflates to monstrous proportions, absorbing Puttermesser's lover and almost the whole city before Puttermesser kills her. (A golem naturally makes an appearance in Pynchon's woods as well.) And Puttermesser's own death gives us one of the most poignant, and ultimately despairing, visions of paradise in recent literature.

In the same way, Mason and Dixon's line, plowing a Euclidean-straight swath hundreds of miles through virgin forest, becomes a living creature in its own right, a metaphor more powerful than any of its possible meanings. And if the ramshackle structure of *Mason and Dixon* occasionally wears on the reader, it is saved by prose of breath-taking beauty — more than once, as in the description of dawn in a mist-clouded wood, I found myself thinking of Keats.

The Churching of America, 1776-1990 (Rutgers, $15.95, 321 pp.), by two sociologists, Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, was first published in 1992, and has been reprinted continuously in paperback ever since. It is one of the most important books on American religion I know. Finke and Stark adopt a microeconomic lens on their subject, starting with Adam Smith's observation that people open their purses much more readily to upstart preachers than to the beneficed clergy of the established churches.

Successful churches in America have always been defined by opposition to the mainstream culture, and the history of American Protestantism has been one of "churches" giving way to "sects"—Episcopalians to Methodists, Methodists to Baptists, intellectualized services to the emotional and pentecostal. The recent upsurge of Pentecostal Protestantism at the expense of the mainstream churches, Finke and Stark argue, has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been going on for two centuries; it's just the first time that the media have noticed.

Along the way, Finke and Stark, who presumably have no axe to grind, offer a number of cautions to liberal Catholic church reformers. Current trends in American Catholicism map closely to those in Episcopalianism and Presbyterianism a half century or so ago. Ominously, there are now fewer Episcopalians and Presbyterians in America than there are Catholics in Los Angeles.

Finally, this year I reread, I think for the fourth time, Charles Taylor's magisterial *Sources of the Self* (Harvard, $21, 599 pp.). Taylor, who seems to have mastered all of Western literature and a good many non-Western sources as well, attempts nothing less than a comprehensive history of the Western understanding of the moral self, and carries it off brilliantly.

Taylor calls his quest one of "moral ontology." Our moral selves, he argues, are two-thousand-year-deep palimpsests, embodying layer upon layer of theories of the good, some so deeply entwined with our neural apparatus that we believe them to be instinctive. In broad outline, Taylor follows that development from Plato's conception of the good as a higher, exterior, order, through the progressive interiorization of moral sources during the Renaissance, to the Protestant sacralization of the common life—"God loveth adverbs"—and finally through Romanticism to the "thin" proceduralist ethics of moderns like John Rawls, with their taste for the procedurally correct at the expense of the substantively good.

One can certainly disagree with this or that of Taylor's interpretations, but I have encountered no work of comparable scope, and ease, and fairness. If *Sources* has a flaw, it is that Taylor, while professing his unhappiness with the "prodigious subjectivity" of the modernist stance, does not attempt to formulate his own position, a failing he freely concedes. No matter. For anyone who enjoys the challenge of thinking systematically about moral questions, Taylor's book does splendid service in clarification and ground-clearing.

Mary Lee Freeman

Mary Lee Freeman is a nurse and graduate student at the MGH Institute of Health Professions, Boston, and a former Commonweal *intern.*

R. C. Hutchinson's *A Child Possessed* (London Bridge Trade, $11.95, 351 pp.), originally published in 1964 to great acclaim but long since out of print, became newly available this past spring thanks to public demand following its reading on the BBC's "Book at Bed." The *Times* called it "a novel which achieves nobility" and a reading of it reminds one how utterly rare is that achievement. Set in Provence and Marseilles, it is the story of a Russian-born lorry driver and his severely mentally handicapped teenage daughter, recently released at his request from the institution where she had been living since toddlerhood, unbeknownst to him. Years ago, a rather hardy and discriminating friend of mine confessed to being physically and mentally spent at the end of the book, and asked that I buy up any and all copies I could find in Boston and Cambridge bookstores. With the reissue, such treasure hunts are no longer necessary.

"I didn't even know there was such a thing as a Gothic novel."

A second classic making a 1997 reappearance is a collection of Karl Rahner's 1946 Lenten sermons, titled *The Need and Blessing of Prayer*. Bruce W. Gillette's new translation (Liturgical Press, $9.95, 101 pp.) beautifully captures the passion and eloquence of this theological and spiritual master. Originally delivered in a church in the heart of a crumbled, postwar Munich, the sermons are at times achingly poignant. "Do you remember the nights in the cellar, the nights of deadly loneliness amidst the harrowing crush of people?" Rahner asks at the start of an extended reflection on opening one's "rubbled-over heart" through prayer. "You will become aware that in truth you are not at all rubbled-over, that your jail is closed only to empty finiteness, that its deadly emptiness is only the false appearance of God, that his silence, the eerie stillness, is filled by the Word without words, by him who is above all names, by him who is everything in everything. And his silence tells you that he is there. . . . Become aware that he has been expecting you for quite some time in the deepest dungeon of your rubbled-over heart."

It is not surprising that "Preacher" and "Teacher of Prayer" are two of the most compelling chapters in Harvey D. Egan's *Karl Rahner: Mystic of Everyday Life*, a forthcoming volume in the Crossroad "Spiritual Legacy" series. In this age of spirituality-lite, unfettered by theology, Crossroad and Egan have done a tremendous service in presenting this "sapiential theologian" who "compresses all Christianity into three mysteries—Trinity, Incarnation, and grace—[and] also unfolds these mysteries into every dimension of human life, even into a 'theology of everyday things'—a theology of work, of seeing, of laughing, of eating and sleeping."

Those of you who can't remember the last time a book made you laugh so hard you had to take a break to compose yourself before continuing simply must go out and purchase the egregiously undercelebrated David James Duncan novel, *The Brothers K* (Doubleday, $12.95, 645 pp.). A hilarious, sobering, raucous, and powerful book, it chronicles the lives

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of the eight-member Chance family from 1956 to 1980. Interbreed the Karamazov clan and Salinger's Glass family, transplant them to Oregon, add doses of Seventh Day Adventism and minor-league baseball and Vietnam, throw in your own family for good measure—and you'll have some idea of the Chances. This is a book of so many memorable and finely wrought scenes and moments that you will while away many hours swapping favorite passages with fellow readers: the Roger Maris reflections, the Psalm Wars, Irwin confronting his father after the sports banquet, "Papa Toe's" pitch that goes clear over the backstop and out of the park. Buy multiple copies to hand out at Christmas.

Having been converted into a rabid Duncan fan, I bought his 1983 *The River Why* (Doubleday, $11.95, 291 pp.), a very different and altogether quirky novel. Nevertheless, the sheer originality of the Duncan style makes the reader more than willing to do some occasional (and invigorating!) upstream paddling in this award-winning first novel. *River Teeth* (Doubleday, $10.95, 259 pp.) is a 1995 collection of stories and writings that will ease the post-*Brothers K* withdrawal symptoms. The title is Duncan's childhood name for the centuries-old pieces of wood knots lying in riverbeds—the sole, stubborn remnants of decomposed riverbank conifers. "There comes a river, whose current is time, that does a similar sculpting in the mind....There are hard, cross-grained whorls of memory that remain inexplicably in us long after the straight-grained narrative material that housed them washed away. Most of these whorls are not stories, exactly; more often they're self-contained moments of shock or of inordinate empathy; moments of violence, uncaught dishonesty, tomfoolery; of mystical terror; lust; preposterous love; preposterous joy....The emotional impact of such experiences is often huge....Some river tooth experiences, whether shared or not, possess the solidity of a geographer's bearing mark and help us find our way." About conifer river teeth Duncan says, "You sense antiquity when you heft one"; about the river teeth in this collection and scattered plentifully in Duncan's novels, one can say, "You sense the artistry when you heft one."

For starving students and food lovers on your Christmas list, you can do no better than Didi Emmons's *Vegetarian Planet* cookbook (Harvard Common, $14.95, 564 pp.). This chef at "the hippest eatery in Boston" (*Boston Globe*) is too exuberant to be sanctimonious. Anyone who can make a carnivore salivate over a meatless "Big Chili and Hot Stews" chapter, who admits in the soup chapter, "Frankly, I'm not a stock person," and who shares a recipe for the humble yet delightful tomato sandwich (white bread, mayo...) is someone I like having around in my kitchen.

Robert H. Bell

Robert H. Bell is William R. Kenan, Jr., Professor of English at Williams College, where he directs the Project for Effective Teaching.

A book of great power and permanent value is James Carroll's *An American Requiem: God, My Father, and the War that Came between Us* (Houghton-Mifflin, $23.95, 279 pp.). Jim Carroll was an all-American boy: ROTC cadet-of-the-year at Georgetown, called to the priesthood, devoted to the poor and the black, opposed to the Vietnam War. Carroll's father was Joseph Carroll, an FBI agent, commissioned the youngest general in Air Force history, and founding director of the Defense Intelligence Agency. General Carroll spied the Russian missles in Cuba, and for the entire course of the Vietnam War controlled the information and selected the targets. Their relationship was dramatic and agonizing, especially when Jim became politically active and finally left the priesthood. *An American Requiem* is a modern spiritual autobiography, gorgeously written, with the intricacy of great fiction. It's also a rich social history, with cameos of Martin Luther King, Jr., J. Edgar Hoover, Cardinal Francis Spellman, LBJ, JFK, Pope John XXIII—even a genuine Elvis spotting. Brilliant, beautiful, and heart-breaking, it won the National Book Award for nonfiction and is now available in paperback.

One of our very best poets, Robert Pinsky, published *The Figured Wheel: New and Collected Poems 1966–96* (Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, $30, 300 pp.). Poems such as "The Want Bone" and "History of My Heart" are personal, intimate, and irresistible. Pinsky's poems also have cultural weight, lyric reach, mythic might, pervasive self-irony, and enormous gusto. Writing about anything from tennis to psychiatrists, he is vital, wise, and funny. Pinsky is also a notable literary critic and a splendid translator of Dante's *Inferno*.

Also of exceptional merit are Robert Fagles's translations of *The Iliad* and, recently, *The Odyssey* (Viking, $35, 541 pp.). Fagles's versions may well supersede the excellent translations of Lattimore and Fitzgerald to become the Homer of our time. What Fagles achieves is remarkable: an English Homer that conveys both the gritty realism and sublime nobility of the original Greek; the salty brine, the weary vistas, the endless wandering, the confusion, terror, and loss. In Fagles's Homer both the gods and heroes are all too human and larger than life, vivid and dramatic. Fagles conveys the key Homeric quality, energy. This *Odyssey* hits all the marks.

I admired several new novels this year, including two by young women writing postcolonial magic realism. Arundhati Roy's first novel, *The God of Small Things* (Random House, $23, 319 pp.), is an unrelentingly sad story narrated in extraordinary language, with grotesque and weird humor. Self-consciously literary, Roy's style recalls the glories of Marquez and Rushdie: fabulist narrative, teeming with whimsy, verbal felicity, metaphoric possibilities. The central characters are Indian twins, Rahel and her brother Estha, who are seven years old in 1969. Although the language is occasionally overwrought, and the tragedy too heavily foreshadowed, this book is deeply compelling—especially the passionate love scene and the shattering denouement. A best seller for several weeks, *The God of Small Things* has been awarded the 1997 Booker Prize.

Another first-rate novel is Cristina Gar-

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cia's *The Aguero Sisters* (Knopf, $24, 300 pp.). Like Garcia's first novel, *Dreaming in Cuban*, *The Aguero Sisters* is a family saga spanning generations and oceans, with exiles figurative and literal, obsessions, passions, sex, and mystery. Garcia's great theme is "the nature of longing, the nervous pressure in the heart that never wanes," depicted with lush operatic excess. Mundane reality is depicted in often lyrical language and punctuated with supernatural visitations, ghosts, spirits, and mystical musings. Here "Miracles arrive every day from the succulent edge of disaster, defying nature." People may "die many times, but never forever." Characters entertain ludicrously kooky beliefs, that "there's an unlicensed spot in the brain that if manipulated just right could keep a person happy for decades." Reading *The Aguero Sisters*, you can believe that.

Reina Aguero, renowned Amazonian goddess, daring electrician, and fabled lover, lives in Castro's Cuba. Her half-sister Constancia has a very different sort of white magic: the epitomical entrepreneur, she makes and markets fabulous cosmetics in Florida. Reina and Constancia represent the divided spirit of Cuba; separated for thirty years, they reunite in Florida in 1991. At one level, the story is an engaging mystery. How did their mother die and why did their father, a prominent naturalist, commit suicide? But most of all, and like *The God of Small Things*, *The Aguerro Sisters* lives in and for its language, to and from the sublime and ridiculous, from the clichéd to the unknowable and unspeakable. Garcia's prose has sweaty grit and wings of gossamer. The passions are potent, the magic bewitching, and the humor perpetual. "This is a problem in Cuba. Even the most gnarled, toothless, scabrous, sclerotic, pigeon-toed, pestilential men on the island believe themselves irresistible to women." It's the adjectives "pigeon-toed and pestilential" that mark Garcia's outrageous, excessive, and triumphant vision. Cristina Garcia, magic realist, is for real.

David Castronovo

David Castronovo is professor of English at Pace University. His most recent book, a critical study of the American novelist Richard Yates, was written in collaboration with Steven Goldleaf.

The books I'd like to recommend are notable for three qualities: fine craftsmanship, curious but permanently important themes, and distinctive voices. Despite the fact that each is a model of lucidity, they all demand close reading.

John Banville's *The Untouchable* (Knopf, $25, 368 pp.) is a spy novel of sorts. As an Irishman fictionalizing a grim chapter in English history, Banville explores the betrayals of the Cambridge spies, that notorious group of Englishmen who were recruited by the Soviet Union in the 1930s and thereafter lived under cover at the very center of British power. His narrator and protagonist is Victor Maskell, a fastidious rogue based on the real life art historian and Keeper of the Queen's Pic-

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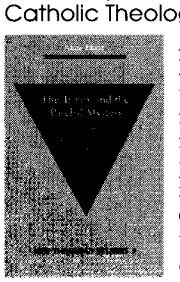

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tures Anthony Blunt. This Marxist — whose cohorts include fictionalized versions of Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean (not to mention a spectacularly sinister version of Graham Greene)— is also depicted as a Royalist, sometime friend of "Mrs. W.," head of the Courtauld Institute, and all-around enigma. Here is a spy who loves Englishness and strangely detests the Soviet Union —"the Promised Land we would never reach, and never wanted to reach." Maskell's book-bred idealism and desire to make a better world combine with a kind of ruthless stoicism and willingness to sacrifice basic decency for some vague future.

Readers are presented with a tormented Britain in a thirty-year crisis. Everything crumbled between the 1930s and the 1960s—an empire, an economy, a traditional way of life— but most sadly the judgment and honor of some elite people in control of national security. Banville's Maskell—the embodiment of Britain's hubris —is shown in the period after he has been exposed, disgraced, and stripped of his knighthood and academic honors. We hear his ruminations ("no one really minds a bit of treachery, no one on the inside I mean") and are startled by the way this warped idealist betrayed and deceived his superiors and himself. I don't know of any contemporary fictional work about England that sets such a complex figure against such a vivid sociopolitical background.

Another book that freights its themes with irony and wit is Geoffrey O'Brien's *Hardboiled America* (Da Capo, $16.95, 197 pp.), an expanded version of his classic study of lurid crime paperbacks. Without tiresome special pleading for the value of mass entertainment, O'Brien looks at the covers and contents of those pop novels that people devoured between the Crash and the mid-1960s. After tracing the evolution of the paperback detective novel, O'Brien lyrically evokes the talents of the writers and painters who made the low-budget crime novel an American original. These demons of productivity—including stars like Chandler and Hammett and later less-recognized figures such as David Goodis and Jim Thompson—brought crime thrillers out of the stilted world of butlers and baronesses and into the barrooms and cheap hotels of a real America. Hyperrealism was their game, and O'Brien analyzes their spare artistry. "A dime-store Dostoyevsky" is his description of Jim Thompson. In his own hardboiled, poetic style, O'Brien captures the sense of lurking menace that made American fictional crime a once proud and authentic genre. He also has some scathing things to say about what TV and the movies have done since the 1950s to make evil into a trivial commodity.

George W.S. Trow's *Within the Context of No Context* (Atlantic Monthly Press, $11, 119 pp.), is about American mass media and the decline of our national sense of living history. Trow, a *New Yorker* contributor and member of an old Eastern family of printers and newspaper men, attempts nothing less than an account of how we have left the old world of real news and solid contexts and entered the outer space of media-driven culture. Trow argues that from the 1920s to our era —from Walter Winchell and the Luce organization right up to the TV talk shows— Americans have been made players in a game of trivia and deception. We no longer get authentic news stories and opinion—or even genuine gossip. "Synthetic talk" rather than real stories, false intimacy rather than objective observation, manufactured context rather than historical background: these are Trow's conflicting cultural formulations. Trow uses a sly prose (and short epigrammatic paragraphs with newspaper headings) to mock the enemy— the programmers and pundits who are interested in "hits" and demographics rather than the honest purveying of information. He indicts our media culture for murdering history and adult judgment; World War I, according to a game-show host, "was popular in its own day." His skewering of TV and journalistic clichés and his use of telling quotations are memorable features of this brilliant, quirky screed. Trow's conclusion is that we still have the external past in the form of buildings and political parties, but we are no longer the same nation.

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My final recommendation is Alberto Manguel's *A History of Reading* (Viking, $26.95, 372 pp.), a copiously illustrated, elegant account of many centuries of books , many cultural styles of literacy. Manguel, a prolific writer and editor who was born in Argentina and now works in Canada, alerts us to many different reading habits—everything from Augustine's watching Ambrose read silently, to the sixteenth-century Venetian printer Aldus Manutius pioneering the small book, to Cuban workers in cigar factories listening to Alexander Dumas. (How do you think we got the Monte Cristo cigar?) Manguel digs deep into his many quarries, providing the reader with entertaining accounts of everything from the development of libraries to the latest findings about what our eyes do when they negotiate a page. "A history" is Manguel's heroic and totally unpretentious way of telling stories about readers—be they Mesopotamian interpreters of birds' footsteps or great writers discovering their predecessors.

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Alane Salierno Mason

Alane Salierno Mason is an editor at W. W. Norton. Her last article for Commonweal *was "Respect: An Italian-American Story" (October 10). She lives in Brooklyn.*

In the age of hype, one gets used to being disappointed. That is, it's much better to be the first to discover a great new book or movie than it is to follow the crowd, because once you've heard everyone say how wonderful something is, you are no longer in a private relation to the thing, but participating in a social phenomenon. Either you feel rebellious, and don't want to like it; or you do want to like it, and feel let down.

It's better to wait. There's a particular, pungent pleasure in discovering for oneself books that have dropped from media-view and recommending them to others who might also have missed them in the equivalent of the first-run theaters. To do so is also to become part of the process of moving something from short-term to long-term cultural memory.

One such recent discovery for me was Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (Vols. 1&2, Pantheon, boxed hardcover set $40, 280 pp.). I was given *Maus* as a gift a couple of years ago, but hadn't gotten to reading either volume until recently. I had an image of them as cartoon books about the Holocaust, risky, ambitious, sophisticated, high art, depressing. What I had never understood, and what bowled me over when I finally picked them up (and could hardly put them down), is that they are a father-son story, and a riveting, hilarious portrait of an extremely difficult man, the artist's father. The son's dutifulness and fury, the father's self-absorption and maniacal stinginess, are the foreground; the Holocaust story is background, the books' reason to be, but also a way for the son to grapple with who his father is. They are a magnificent, fascinating work.

Another find in plain view for me was Robert Orsi's *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian East Harlem,*

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1880–1950 (Yale University Press, $16, 366 pp.), a book that has gained ever more of a following in the ten years since it was published. It is vivid, accessible cultural history, exploring how immigrants from various parts of Southern Italy became Italian-Americans, and made a place for their homes and streets in their religious beliefs and practices. In a time of the empty uses of the rhetoric of family values, Orsi's book investigates the roles of the values of a particular time and place in the lives of an actual group of people, how those values uplifted or constrained them, and how they were expressed in particular ritual devotions. Its evocation of ideas about family and home, the codes of *rispetto*, ring so startlingly true that I made another discovery; keeping a pen in hand to underline, and using it, can intensify one's engagement with and pleasure in a book. It doesn't magically turn reading into homework, as I'd feared.

There are plenty of Nobel Prize winners in literature available for rediscovery, as so many of them seem vulnerable to being brought out of obscurity for the prize but slipping back into it afterwards. Even during the Bosnian war, I never heard anyone mention *The Bridge on the Drina* (University of Chicago Press, $11.95, 314 pp.), which won Bosnian Serb author Ivo Andric the Nobel Prize in 1961 (he died in 1975). Through the stone's-eye lens of a monumental bridge built over the River Drina by a grand vizier of the Ottoman Empire in the mid-sixteenth century, Andric retells five centuries of Balkan history, from the ferocity and eventual fading of the Ottoman Empire, to the arrogance and stratagems of the Austro-Hungarian, to the coming of World War I. All are seen through the ebb and flow of the daily life of a town on the empire's fringe; an ordinary town with its Muslims, its Christians, and its Jews, but also its distinctive, majestic bridge between East and West. It is not a story of the so-called ancient hatreds of the Balkans, but of provincial experiences of world events with their origins on a large, indifferent canvas; of history's ebb and flow between normalcy and tragedy. At first, the utterly unfashionable narrative approach—not merely om-

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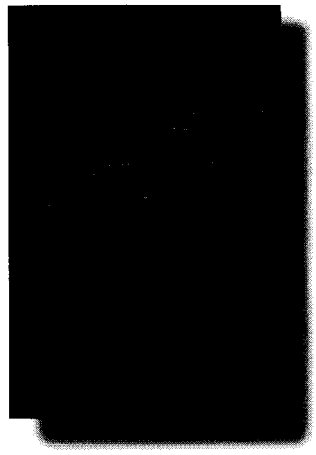

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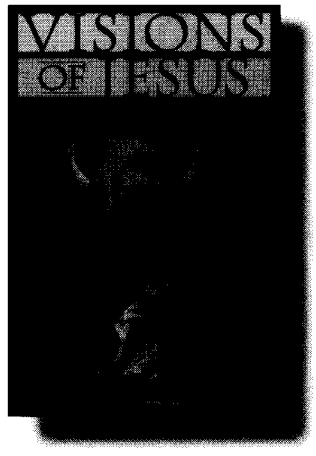

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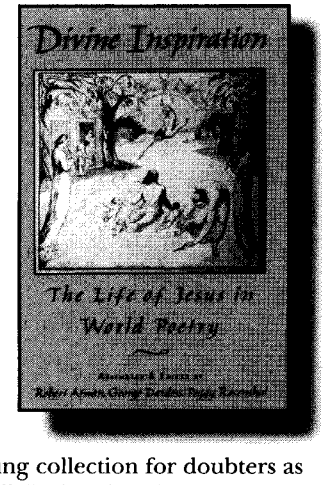

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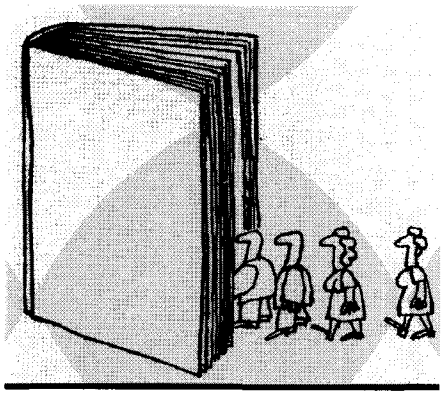

niscient, but pan-historical—is uncomfortably cold, but its cumulative effect is magnificent; the book itself remains as a permanent edifice in one's mind.

Another discovery of the already-known: the pleasure and challenge of reading poetry, something I had neglected to venture since literature classes in school. A friend quoted turn-of-the century Alexandrian poet C.P. Cavafy, and got me to bring to the kitchen table Edmund Keeley's selection and translation of *The Essential Cavafy* (Ecco, $10). I began reading him at night, and though his classical allusions made me feel uneducated, still I was shocked to find him speaking so intimately to a contemporary sense of being in the world; one of vivid physical presences amidst a more general uprootedness, fluid identities, memories of past attachments, constant transition. Then I discovered Ranier Maria Rilke on my shelves—*Sonnets to Orpheus* (Norton, $9.95, 160 pp.) and his prose *Letters to a Young Poet* (Norton, $6.95, 126 pp.) and found his work bursting open in my hands, his language alive, tactile, and transcendent at once, sensually and intellectually exciting. Reading Rilke on a breezy summer day in the Brooklyn Botanical Garden, between naps—that, for me, was to feel I'd accomplished something worthwhile, had really discovered poetry. It was a pleasure appropriately followed and sustained by Ed Hirsch's *Wild Gratitude* (Knopf, $16, 96 pp.), which won the National Book Award for poetry in 1981. I'd certainly had occasion to discover his work sooner, having heard him read; but it was not a disappointment to discover the words on the page now, in this book full of rediscoveries of the taken-for-granted and of the just-remembered past. His language was both familiar and shocking to me, visceral and meditative; his poems are moody, too: funny, depressing, erotic, wistful, worried, grateful, and inspiring of gratitude.

I should make it a policy to give old books this Christmas. You never know when other people might decide to discover what's been in front of their noses while their attention was distracted by keeping up with the new.

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James T. Fisher

James T. Fisher holds the Danforth Chair in Humanities at Saint Louis University. His most recent book is Dr. America: The Lives of Thomas A. Dooley, 1927–61 *(University of Massachusetts Press).*

Many of the best recent books about the seismic changes in American life over the past half-century take the form of community studies or family histories. In her memoir *Dreaming: Hard Luck and Good Times in America* (University of California, $12.95, 343 pp.), the novelist and critic Carolyn See devotes a chapter to her family's brief involvement in 1977 with Leo Sunshine, a West Coast New Age guru and conman last seen in New Delhi sporting a beautifully tailored white suit. "Oh, the embarrassing Californianness of it all," See confesses, launching a pre-emptive strike against the conventional scorn for faddish spirituality.

In fact, See quickly rejoinders, there were plenty of good reasons why millions turned from churches to a dizzying array of alternatives in that besotted decade. "It was just the embarrassing Americanness of it all: all those people struggling with the social explosion that drugs, drink, depression, demoralization, and divorce had been detonating for over a century, like a nationwide string of firecrackers. All across the country, new ways of thinking and newly constructed belief systems were being chosen—systems that could possibly glue back millions of splintered lives."

An extravagant Americanness indeed pervades this haunting and incongruously good-humored account of a life that began in the mid-1930s in the Los Angeles household of a drunken newspaperman, who tended his wife's regular Sunday hangovers by treating her to "a scoop of vanilla ice cream basted with a couple of tablespoons of Hill and Hill Blend." See's father eventually recovered, after a fashion, while her mother (whose beloved older sister, See's Aunt Helen, invariably entreated guests:

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"Let's have a short snort!") has now earned immortality as one of the most colorful holy terrors in the annals of American nonfiction. See's alcoholic first husband also recovered nicely; her second apparently survived a devotion to LSD in the 1960s. See joined the party, but literary ambition was the stimulant that propelled her from the working bohemian class "into something upper-middle or beyond." Two lovely, successful daughters and a happy third marriage to an ex-drinker, later See remains "almost the only one around here who drinks anymore."

Dreaming treats the double-edged tendencies of postwar social mobility ("Getting high, going up, in this society") with disarming candor. Samuel G. Freedman's *The Inheritance: How Three Families and America Moved from Roosevelt to Reagan and Beyond* (Simon and Schuster, $27.50, 464 pp.) presents a more "sobering" tale of three East Coast ethnic Catholic families whose traditional loyalty to the New Deal coalition collapsed under the heavy burdens of race, crime, and suburban exile. Leslie Maeby, Tim Carey, and Frank Trotta, Jr., inherited a commitment to the urban political process, but by the time they met as students at the State University of New York's Albany campus in the mid-1970s, each was a confirmed Republican. The trio tirelessly served the party as professional operatives in state, local, and national elections throughout the 1970s and 1980s, though Trotta grew disillusioned with politics just as his inherited faith in Catholicism was being revived. *The Inheritance* provides richly detailed vignettes of ethnic politics in Baltimore (Maeby's ancestral home) as well as in New Rochelle and Crotonville, New York, the hometowns of Trotta and Carey. Freedman situates his family histories along the fault lines of the New Deal coalition, but for all the genuine empathy (an avowed liberal, Freedman has sought to "inhabit the conservative experience") he directs at his subjects, the result is a bit too reminiscent of earlier studies of liberalism's demise in ethnic America. In *Dreaming*, speculating on the source of her family's unbroken legacy of suffering, the Irish-Catholic Carolyn See insists that "it doesn't have to do with a belief in God." Though See is more interested in the politics of drugs and alcohol than the fate of the Democratic party, her story, with all its wrinkles, is no less representative of postwar American experience than Freedman's. She even supplies a more hopeful ending.

Robert Gordon's *It Came from Memphis* (Faber & Faber, $14.95, 303 pp.) spans the same era as *Dreaming* and *The Inheritance*, but it explores the enduring claims of local tradition rather than the wages of mobility. *It Came from Memphis* is a brilliant guide to a cultural history you won't learn by visiting Graceland or even the retrofitted blues joints along present-day Beale Street. Gordon's Memphis "has always been a place where cultures came together to have a wreck: black and white, rural and urban, poor and rich. The music in Memphis is more than a soundtrack to these confrontations. It is the document of it."

Gordon focuses primarily on such white Memphis musicians as Jim Dickinson, who grew up in the 1950s viewing the manic disc jockey Dewey Phillips's anarchic "Pop Shop" television program ("he'd play a country song, he'd play a rock song, he'd play a blues song") and playing the blues of Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters in garage bands, thinking it was "Chicago music" until he learned that Wolf and Waters were actually expatriates from the nearby Delta. Today, Dickinson argues with much justification that "the Delta blues is going to be one of the most significant Western contributions to the twentieth-century." In the 1960s and 1970s, Dickinson and a large cohort of Memphis artists and musicians adapted the uncompromisingly "poetic furor" of the blues to the doggedly independent recording businesses that dotted the urban landscape (unlike Nashville, Gordon argues, Memphis has never been a "company town"), as well as to the "happenings" and dream carnivals that made the city a central if largely unacknowledged hub of the national counterculture.

The enigmatic Alex Chilton—whose commercial-recording potential quickly deteriorated following his stunning debut as a sixteen-year-old growling vo-

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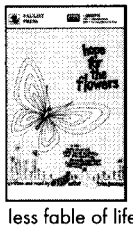

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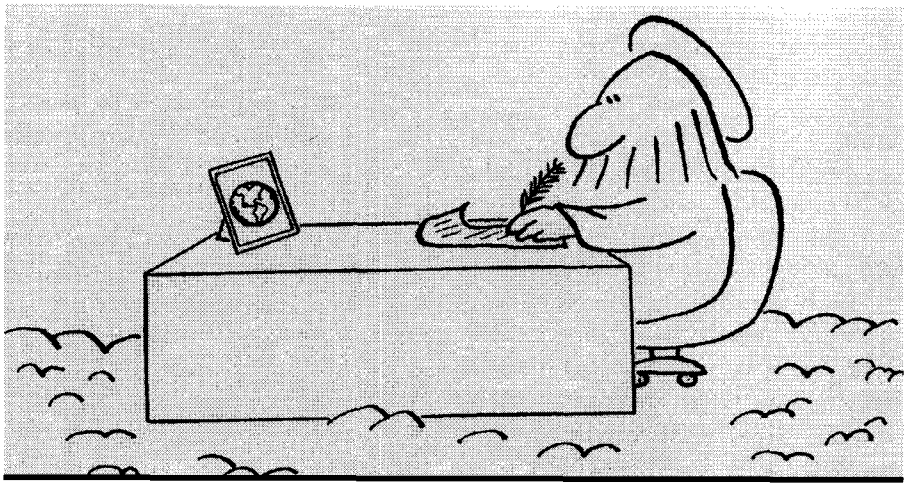

cals on "The Letter," a Memphis-produced number-one hit for the Box Tops in 1967—best exemplifies the local spirit. While it may be a slight stretch for Gordon to liken the career of the extraordinarily gifted Chilton ("he's a cultural icon," explains another Memphis musician, "and gotten paid damn little...and gets very little recognition by the labels") to that of neglected blues giants such as Furry Lewis, *It Came from Memphis* is among the best of the many myth-driven studies of the blues legacy, because it shows how a genuine community practices reverence for tradition.

Elizabeth Johns

Elizabeth Johns teaches art history at the University of Pennsylvania. Her most recent book is American Genre Painting *(Yale). The landscape exhibition that she has co-curated, "New Worlds from Old," opens in Canberra, Australia, in March 1998 and will be seen in Hartford, Connecticut, throughout the fall of 1998.*

In gratitude for the life of Shusaku Endo, the Japanese writer who died in 1996, I re-read his stunning early novel, *Silence* (Taplinger, $9.95, 294 pp.). Endo ponders some implications of the brutal persecution of the Christian community in Japan in the seventeenth century. Several issues are at the heart of his meditation: the relationship between simple faith and educated faith; the symbolic meanings of literal action and the literal meanings of symbolic action; the nature of guilt; and, overwhelmingly, the mystery—what seems to be the inscrutable silence—of God. Another profound reading experience is Endo's *Deep River* (New Directions, $10.95, 216 pp.), which probes whether Christ is truly "in" the world. Using motifs from Isaiah's figure of the suffering servant, Endo makes the reader the companion of an uncomely and mocked hero who searches for the person who may be the reincarnation of his dead wife.

Patrick White's *Voss* (Viking, $9.95, 448 pp.) is based on another kind of journey, that of a real leader of a doomed expedition into the interior of Australia in the mid-nineteenth century. I read the novel in the investigative spirit of an exhibition and book that I was working on comparing nineteenth-century Australian and American landscape paintings. The metaphor of the journey inspired Australian writers and artists attempting to come to terms with their inhospitable environment, one quite distinctive from the fertility of much of the American continent. Whether free or transported into the penal colonies, arriving Australians were baffled by the land's strangeness. At first they took heroic measures to prove the land's malleability by imagining it as very much like England; later they strove to assert their mastery of it by undertaking expensive and arduous (and in most cases doomed) treks into the interior. In such expeditions, they battled against dryness, Aborigines, the peculiarities of their fellow human beings on the trek, and, most of all, their own interior and mysterious darkness. The theme has become a major motif for twentieth-century ruminations about what "being Australian" means.

In *Voss*, Nobel laureate White explores these matters in the character of a stubborn German who journeyed inland and never returned. White limns a sequence of stubbornness, madness, and, most startlingly, of obsessive (and not unrequited) love that Voss had for a young woman, also a loner, whom he met in Sydney during the fund-raising preliminaries of the trip. Through their correspondence (although they never actually received one another's letters), White explores the strangeness of "knowing" another person and the agony of understanding oneself.

Another Australian writer, David Malouf, grapples with related questions in *Remembering Babylon* (Random, $11, 200 pp.). His haunting story presents a white Englishman who as a young boy on a ship had been tossed overboard, found by Aborigines, and absorbed into their community. In the 1850s, having forgotten virtually all he grew up with, he comes upon a straggling white settlement in Queensland and attempts to join the group. To the terrified white settlers he is an insufferable presence. He represents their terror of losing their whiteness in the hostile environment, of becoming savage like the Aborigines, and worst of all, of possibly already being brutal at their core, their real nature hidden by a mere veneer of Englishness. Gemmy, the "black white man," wrestles to recover what he has lost, can remember only snatches of it, and finally, unable to return to who he was, rejoins "his" people. The novel is framed by the reactions of the children who first see Gemmy when he climbs up on the fence that separates their home from the outback and who, fifty years later, attempt to make sense of the experience.

Altogether more radiant journeys, stopping points, and apparent outcomes are traced by the poetry in *Women in Praise of the Sacred: Forty-three Centuries of Spiritual Poetry by Women*, edited by

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Jane Hirshfield (HarperCollins, $13, 259 pp.). Written from a variety of religious traditions, the poems celebrate the sensuous world, the mystery immanent in it, and the strangeness of suddenly being present to God. Rich with yearning and confidence, most of the poems are breathtakingly short. The editor provides biographies and historical context for each poet, placing the modern reader into a moving company of spiritual companions.

Paul Baumann

Paul Baumann is executive editor of Commonweal.

How many gimlet-eyed and razor-tongued English lady novelists can there be? Evidently an unlimited supply. I was vaguely aware of the name Hilary Mantel, but remained wholly innocent of her work until a friend urged her 1989 novel, *Fludd* (Penguin, 186 pp.), on me. It's a magically atmospheric book set in England's damp and gloomy north. Father Angwin, a sodden, grandiloquently grumpy parish priest who has misplaced his faith, takes center stage, at least initially. A wonderfully drawn little platoon of nuns, and the mysterious interventions of Fludd, Angwin's new curate (or at least everyone takes Fludd to be the new curate), keep the reader guessing—about everything.

"The church in this story bears some but not much resemblance to the Roman Catholic church in the real world, c. 1956," Mantel mischievously instructs her readers. After bantering viperishly with his trendy bishop, Angwin is ordered to clear up the unfashionable clutter of his church by chucking most of its plaster statues. In an obscure kind of defiance, Angwin buries the banished troupe of chipped and faded saints in the back yard of the rectory. Things then begin to happen.

Mantel doesn't waste a word or a gesture. My delight with *Fludd* sent me to her 1995 novel *An Experiment in Love* (Henry Holt/Owl, $12, 250 pp.), an as-

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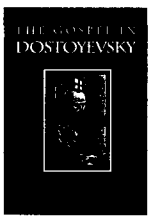

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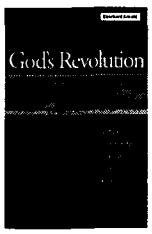

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tringent coming-of-age tale. Carmel, the narrator/protagonist, is a bright and ambitious Catholic school girl from the north who ends up, along with two of her classmates, at university in London. It is 1970, the brave new age of the pill and legal abortion, and the novel follows the fitful progress of the three through the matter-of-factness of adolescent sex, and its not so matter-of-fact consequences. The narrative continually shifts from Carmel's now chastened perspective, to her childhood memories, to the searing story of the girls' university years. Mantel is a deft conjurer of mood and psychology as she captures the superficial intimacy of many college relationships, a knowingness that often conceals profound isolation and loneliness. Caught between the disappointments and bullying of parents, the utilitarian morality of university life, and the utter indifference of the larger world, adolescents naturally cling to one another. Sex and love are something the young imagine they can possess completely, only to discover that nothing as powerful as sex is so easily commanded. Mantel is masterly in showing how nothing touching on human desire is quite what it appears to be at first blush. This is an unnerving book, especially in the way it reveals how careless our treatment of each other can be when personal morality finds little resonance in the forces that order the larger world. Mantel's *A Change of Climate* (Henry Holt/Owl, $12, 321 pp.) is next on my list.

Like most people, I've put off reading Marcel Proust until retirement or until I'm condemned to a long prison sentence. Alain de Botton's whimsical, wonderfully alert *How Proust Can Change Your Life: Not a Novel* (Pantheon, $19.95, 197 pp.) has nearly convinced me to alter my retirement plans and criminal habits. Botton, author of the novels *The Romantic Movement* and *On Love*, appears to be a preternaturally charming fellow. This clever book is a tribute to Proust's singular attributes as a writer, an old-fashioned endorsement of Proust's exquisitely calibrated moral sensibility, and a rumination on the sheer pleasure of reading. Botton makes nearly everything about Proust's notoriously circumscribed life seem as rich and comprehensive as the Parisian's prose style. Proust, of course, was a world-class hypochondriac, yet as Botton puts it, that affliction is best understood as but a symptom of the writer's heightened appreciation of life. Too precious? I didn't find it so. And Botton's stories about Proust's robust father and brother, the latter of whom walks away after being run over by a truck, and about Marcel's attentiveness to his friends and generosity to strangers, especially waiters, fills this slight volume with a wealth of incident and detail.

Above all, Proust was a scrupulous writer and a compulsive rewriter. "Clichés are detrimental insofar as they inspire us to believe that they adequately describe a situation while merely grazing its surface," Botton explains Proust's hatred of lazy writing. "And if this matters, it is because the way we speak is ultimately linked to the way we feel, because how we describe the world must at some level reflect how we first experience it." Just so.

If Botton reminds us that we ultimately possess experience only through an act of the imagination, Roger Shattuck's *Forbidden Knowledge: From Prometheus to Pornography* (Harvest Books, $14.95, 370 pp.) offers a magisterial exploration of the relationship between imagination and the moral life. Shattuck's indispensable book is a fair-minded defense of taboo and of the need to renounce certain kinds of experience and knowledge. This is not a call for censorship—Shattuck's liberal credentials are unassailable—but rather for regulation where needed, as in the case of pornography, condemnation when deserved, and restraint always.

Much of Shattuck's concern originates with his outrage over the recent literary and even moral elevation of the Marquis de Sade. Shattuck, a leading scholar of French literature, is at pains to alert the unsuspecting to how morally repugnant and dangerous Sade's work is. *Forbidden Knowledge* presents a wide-ranging argument, making a case against, among other things, violent pornography, genetic engineering, and the dangers of empathy or compassion in assessing

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criminal culpability. But more important, Shattuck rehabilitates the intellectual case for self-denial as a spiritual and moral good. In brilliant readings of Emily Dickinson and the seventeenth-century novel *La Princesse de Cleves*, he recalls for us the "pleasures of abstinence." "Integrity of feeling," Shattuck suggests, is impossible without a capacity for asceticism. A balance must be struck between knowledge and restraint, between what arouses and satisfies desire and the cultivation of the very sources of desire itself. As Emily Dickinson construed that paradox: "A charm invests a face/ Imperfectly beheld—/The Lady dare not lift her Veil/for fear it be dispelled...."

Forbidden Knowledge has important things to say about the need to approach all human understanding, even scientific understanding, with a full measure of humility. Without an acceptance of limits, a whole world of moral and aesthetic experience is lost to us. □

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

den, called Hugo a theologian of the rank of Saint Augustine and appointed him chair of the diocesan theological commission.

For Father Hugo and the others who gave the retreat (and still give it in Pittsburgh and in Michigan), the church exists to make saints to provide a living witness to the eternal. Without them the church is not a living reality. Without the saints the church is only dead stones.

MARK AND LOUISE ZWICK
Houston, Tex.
The writers are members of the Houston Catholic Worker house, Casa Juan Diego.

The writer replies:

Father Egan and the Zwicks are exemplary Catholic Workers whose testimony is valuable. But so is the trustworthiness of those I quoted in my sidebar. *Pace* Father Egan, both Tom Sullivan and Nina Polcyn Moore made the retreat. Their criticisms are well-informed and firsthand.

Father Egan and the Zwicks are well aware that the "basic retreat"—as

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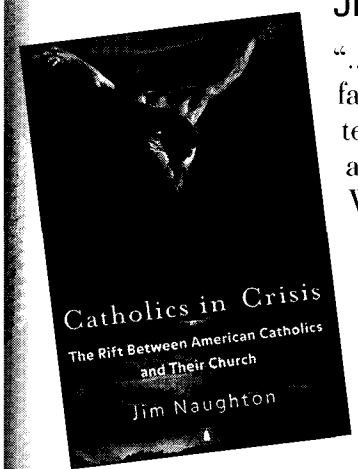

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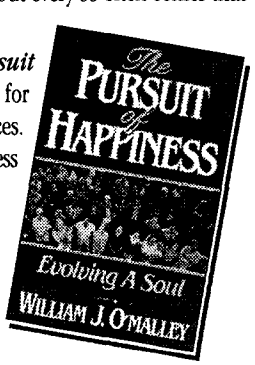

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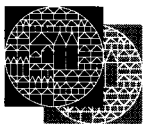

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But what, dear reader, could be a more concrete and practical way of sowing these seeds for the NEXT GENERATION than introducing some of them to the magazine itself? What better time than Christmas? And what could be easier than turning to the insert in this issue and writing in the names of some of the NEXT GENERATION near and dear to you:
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lifelong Catholic Worker Stanley Vishnewski called it in a lengthy, balanced, sometimes hilarious chapter in his book *Wings of the Dawn* (Catholic Worker)—was the subject of controversy from the start among Catholic Workers. That is why I quoted not only those who raised questions about the retreat's wisdom and character, but also mentioned ardent supporters like Sister Peter Claver Fahy (*see* her beautiful article on the retreat and Father Hugo in the October-November 1997 *Catholic Worker*).

As for making a judgment about Father Hugo's "holistic" theology, my tastes may differ from the Zwicks', but readers can make their own judgment by reading the collection of his writings I referred to in the sidebar. Nowhere did I write, as the Zwicks imply, that Father Hugo "didn't really influence Dorothy." Such a statement would be laughable. I am afraid that in this case, it is the Zwicks who have been revisionistic. And I do seriously doubt that Dorothy Day would have followed Hugo "to the stake had he gone the route of Savanarola." She was too shrewd to end up in that predicament, and always remained in the heart of the church.

The Zwicks' statement that next to Peter Maurin, Father Hugo was the most important influence in Day's life is also problematic. I heard Dorothy speak much more often about her father and Forster Batterham than Hugo. Vishnewski has written that Dorothy told him that Father Pacifique Roy—a priest of the retreat movement who lived at the Catholic Worker's Easton farm—was one of the three men who had a great influence on her life, the other two being Maurin and Ammon Hennacy. This does not deny Hugo's influence, but places it in perspective.

As for the full story of Father Hugo's relationship to church authorities in Pittsburgh, I again repair to Vishnewski. He writes: "I do not know all the facts. But the story of the controversy must be locked up in the chancery archives of Pittsburgh." Someone should research it. Nor is there any question that Cardinals Dearden and Wright, like Dorothy Day herself, found Father Hugo a faithful and inspiring priest. That Wright could have ranked Hugo along with Augustine, however, is not convincing to me, at least after reading Hugo's writings.

Finally, to invest energy in a controversy about the retreat movement seems to me beside the point. If the retreat has been fruitful for the Zwicks, Father Egan, and their work—which it has—more power to it and to them. If others found it wanting, that should be recognized and stated.

PATRICK JORDAN

Zahn's neutrality

In his article "The Peasant Who Defied Hitler" [September 12], Gordon Zahn writes: "Although I had regularly sought out evidence of opposition to the [German] war effort [on the part of leaders of the Roman Catholic church in Germany], the harvest was slim." He adds: "The church had neither condemned the ongoing war as unjust, nor even hinted that Catholics might, much less should, refuse to support it."

It certainly is two-faced for Mr. Zahn to hint that the leaders of the Catholic church in Germany were wrong in not campaigning openly and officially against the German war ef-

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fort at the risk of losing their lives, while he himself claimed the status of neutrality by being a "conscientious objector" to the United States' participation in World War II in order to protect his own life—a stance that is identical with the form of neutrality implicitly adopted by the Catholic church leaders in Germany. I am sure Mr. Zahn did not openly and vigorously oppose the American war effort, as he seems to have expected of the German church's leaders.

I myself bitterly opposed being drafted during World War II, but I answered my country's call, even though I was drafted before I could finish high school—a devastating stigma never fully erased. All during the time Mr. Zahn sat home comfortably protected, I and others served; some of those others gave their life's blood so that Mr. Zahn could live to write his silly diatribes against those who protected his "freedom of the press."

WILLIAM J. HOLDORF
Woodridge, Ill.

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The writer replies:

Mr. Holdorf's tirade is best answered by referring him to my books dealing with the issues he raises. Instead of spending the war sitting "comfortably at home," I was one of the many assigned to unpaid Civilian Public Service (in fact, we were supposed to pay for our food and keep, which very few of us did or could). My first assignment was to a forestry camp in New Hampshire, the one and only Catholic camp, one sponsored and maintained by the Association of Catholic Conscientious Objectors. The ACCO was in fact the Catholic Worker, and observed the usual CW standard of gourmet diet and lavish comfort. If he is interested, he might be able to find my account of that winter in some library: *Another Part of the War: The Camp Simon Story* (1979).

As to the wartime record of the Catholic church in Germany, my *German Catholics and Hitler's Wars* (1969) might be helpful. One example of many episcopal statements concerning service in World War II is Archbishop Groeber's (Freiburg) preface to his *Handbook for the Religious Questions of the Day* (1937): "The church shares responsibility for truth and right, for order and peace. In our nation's present fateful hour, the leaders of the church take their place in explicit loyalty at the side of the men of the state, dedicated to their own defense against the common enemy. Since they fight for Christianity and the true faith in God on the part of the German Volk, they are, in their way, giving surest support for the ramparts the Fuehrer has erected against Bolshevism in our Faterland."

In brief, what should count on the issue of the German Catholic church's response to Hitler, the Nazis, and their war is not so much the lack of open opposition to the war but rather the strength and urgency of the calls for support.

GORDON ZAHN
Milwaukee, Wis.

It's William Holy Day?

I'm sure someone has already told you that the spelling of Billie Holiday's name in your October 24 editorial was wrong. The writer is not a jazz person?

Correction aside, the editorial was excellent. "Nothing Sacred" may not be superb television, but it's not bad—and it has some very good "Catholic" moments. The Catholic League scares me...seems the "fortress mentality" still lives.

(MRS.) GENE BOGUCKI
Petersburgh, N.Y.

From the editors: We did indeed misspell Billie Holiday's name, much to our chagrin. Was it because it was Nina Simone who was singing? All those who noted our error will be comforted to know the penance imposed on us by Father Ray: We have to read even more material from the Catholic League.

Saints & sinners

I was delighted to read your positive editorial on ABC's "Nothing Sacred." I have found the program informative and inspiring; it has served to remind me why I am seeking ordination (within the Anglican tradition) after many years of discernment. Father Ray's faith, his doubts, his sexual stirrings are real to anyone trying to serve God, whether as a member of the laity or the clergy. For too long we have tried to elevate priests to a position above the laity—to believe, somehow, that they are in some mysterious way holier than the rest of us. I thank

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Vatican II for reminding us that we are all ministers of God through our baptism.

Growing up as a Roman Catholic, I found myself not only in awe of the priesthood (I still am) but believing that priests were more than human, almost to the point of idolizing them. I thank God that as I grew older I realized that priests have strengths and weaknesses, joys and sorrows. It is this reality that I see in "Nothing Sacred."

ALLAN CUSEO
Rochester, N.Y.

Unkind to Mother Teresa

I was truly disturbed by the ungracious notes sounded in your obituary of Mother Teresa. The tolerance you display toward her carping critics depreciates her work and diminishes whatever good words you offer on her work and life. Yes, of course she did heroic work for the most wretched of Christ's brothers and sisters, *but* she was no feminist, opposed contraception (so did Dorothy Day), and should have devoted more time to social reform. Wasn't she busy enough for you?

The sour note of political correctness in all this is reflected in the bad logic, poor structure, and grammatical errors (you must mean "her all-but-*incomprehensible*," not "all-but-*uncomprehending*" dismissal of contraception) in the piece, one of the poorest I have read in my more than thirty years as a subscriber. Your writer—and perhaps more than he or she—need to meditate on Saint Paul's words: "...there are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:4). Let each of us do his or her part in the body of Christ and not scorn the other members.

MARIO D. MAZZARELLA
Newport News, Va.

The editors reply:

We used the word "uncomprehending" to convey our sense that in her frequent condemnations of contraception Mother Teresa often equated it with abortion in a way that indicated she did not comprehend either the crucial moral distinctions that separate the question of abortion from that of contraception, or the moral considerations offered in good faith by many couples and theologians who regard contraception as acceptable.

Our editorial on Mother Teresa was not a pietistic exercise but a journalistic reflection and evaluation. Aspects of Mother Teresa's work, and the ideological uses to which her admittedly heroic example is often put, raised legitimate issues that deserved a response. As the editorial noted, we think she was wrong on the role of women in the church, but that her harsher critics were tone-deaf to the radical religious nature of her mission.

DeLillo & religion

Reviewing Don DeLillo's new novel *Underworld* [November 7], Paul Elie writes: "No one as far as I know has called DeLillo a religious writer." Well, John McClure has, in a fine essay in the fall issue of *Cross Currents* discussing DeLillo and other writers searching for religion in a secular world. Readers may want to complement Elie's insightful survey of the religious dimension of DeLillo's work with McClure's analysis in the larger context of literature's recent return to religion.

PEGGY ROSENTHAL
Rochester, N.Y.

Bob Dylan, prophet

Re: Your Et Cetera item [October 10] on John Paul II's sharing the stage with Bob Dylan in Bologna. In 1965, when I was thirteen years old, filled with the idealism of Catholic faith and American virtue, yet also aware of at least some of their shortcomings, a friend played a Bob Dylan album for me entitled "Bringing It All Back." Suddenly I realized that I still had a lot more to learn, and yet I held on to the certitude that "God makes all things work together for the good of those who love him."

Since then the poetry and music of Bob Dylan have always been a part of my life of faith. His organ in "Like a Rolling Stone" makes me think of cathedrals being constructed, his allusions in "Love Minus Zero/No Limit," "It Takes a Lot to Laugh, It Takes a Train to Cry," and "When the Ship Comes In" remind me of the trials and rewards of faith and the great spiritual debt we owe to all the martyrs and especially to the Jewish victims of the death camps. His later albums include some of the finest devotional/religious poetry in the language, charged with Catholic meaning and consequence, the Virgin Mary present at every turn.

Pope John Paul was right on when he interpreted "Blowing in the Wind" by using the "Christocentric" principle. I'm sure Dylan was pleased.

RAYMOND FROST
Daly City, Calif.

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IN CYBERSPACE, ALL THINGS CATHOLIC

Joseph M. Incandela

The Internet has produced what one Web site (appropriately called ".god.com") has called "a temple without bounds." For Catholics, especially for students and educators, the Web has put the riches of a 2,000-year tradition at one's fingertips. You'll meet most of the works of Augustine and Aquinas at a site playfully called "Fides Quaerens Internetum." All the documents of Vatican II are on the Web, as is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The Bible is available in several translations.

For those interested in theological ethics, the Web grants immediate access to the most contemporary issues (for example, the Supreme Court's ruling on physician-assisted suicide). And, there are things I can offer my classes only through the Web. Some of my students have corresponded with death-row inmates over e-mail through a site called "Penn-Pals Prison Inmate Network."

What follows is a partial list of Web sites I've collected for a course in Catholic ethics. Readers who wish to see the full list can go to the website for my course: http://www.saint marys.edu/~incandel/cst.html.

http://wsnet.com/~alapadre/ AlaPadre's Catholic Corner: Miscellaneous information on the Catholic church and an online version of *The Catholic Encyclopedia*; includes updates on many ethical issues.

http://www.mcgill.pvt.k12.al.us/jerryd/cathmob.htm#MORE LINKS The Catholic Mobile: A site with over 2,500 links—extensive information on the Catholic church, church history, worship, etc. Descriptions of non-Catholic denominations (including the First Church of Cyberspace); directories of Catholic resources on the Internet.

http://www.vatical.va The Vatican Home Page: Information about the pope, on-line versions of his major writings, and a wealth of background about the Vatican.

http://www.mcgill.pvt.k12.al.us/jerryd/cm/inst.htm Information on the Institution of the Church: The on-line code of canon law, Catholic teaching on the papacy; a complete list of all the world's cardinals, with links to those with their own home pages; home pages of Catholic religious orders and dioceses in the United States.

http://www.christusrex.org/www1/CDHN/ccc.html#CATECHISM The On-line Version of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

http://www.cin.org/vatiidoc.html The Documents of Vatican II.

http://www.gospelcom.net.bible? The Bible Gateway: The entire Bible online.

http://www.mcgill.pvt.k12.al.us/jerryd/cm/moral.htm A site containing excerpts from *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* on morality and moral issues, a directory to ethics sites on the WWW, morality, and conscience.

http://honey.acu.edu.au/~yuri/ethics/sex.html The Catholic Church and Sexuality: A brief background.

http://pwa.acusd.edu/~hinman/abortion.html Internet Links Relating to Abortion: A survey of and references to some of the more important essays on abortion, the complete *Roe* v. *Wade* decision, along with significant Supreme Court decisions, texts of *Humanae vitae* and *The Gospel of Life*, links to both prolife and prochoice sites.

http://www.serve.com/fem4life/ Feminists for Life of America: A feminist, prolife site.

http://listserv.american.edu/catholic/church/vatican/giftlife.doc The 1987 Vatican Declaration on Reproductive Technologies.

http://pwa.acusd.edu/~hinman/euthanasia.html Internet Links Relating to Euthanasia: Legislation, court decisions, an annotated bibliography, and links to other sites relating to death and dying.

http://www.mcgill.pvt.k12.al.us/jerryd/cm/cst.htm Catholic Social Teaching: Statements from official Catholic sources, principles of Catholic social teaching, links to other Catholic social justice sites.

http://nch.ari.net National Coalition for the Homeless Home Page: Online information on homelessness and poverty, links to other Internet resources.

http://www.acusd.edu/ethics/gender.html Resources on gender and sexism, as well as information on affirmative action.

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/angel/procon/bishopstate.html The 1980 statement of the U.S. Catholic bishops on capital punishment.

http://sun.soci.niu.edu/~critcrim/dp/dp.html Death Penalty Information: Statistics about executions and death-row populations, women on death row, methods different states use to execute, other links to death-penalty sites.

http://www.netaxs.com/~nvweb/pcusa Pax Christi, a National Catholic Peace Movement: Statement of the beliefs of Pax Christi members, names of prominent members, links to the nonviolence web. □

We hope you will drop in on our website and please tell your friends who may never have read COMMONWEAL:
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Joseph M. Incandela *is chair of the Department of Religious Studies at Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana.*

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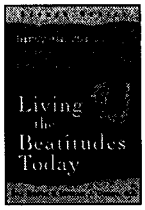

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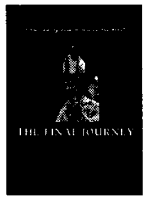

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